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THE COMMODORE'S DAUGHTERS

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FLAGS ARE FLYING. From the Norwegian of BJÖRNSTJERNE BJÖRNSON.

Each Volume contains a specially written Introduction by the Editor.

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THE COMMODORE'S DAUGHTERS

BY

JONAS LIE

TRANSLATED FROM THE NORWEGIAN

BY

H. L. BRÆKSTAD AND GERTRUDE HUGHES

LONDON

WILLIAM HEINEMANN

1892

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INTRODUCTION.

EARLY in the spring of 1874, the present writer happened to be the guest of the late head of the great Gyldendal house of publishers, the elegant and hospitable Mr. Frederik Hegel, in the classic parlour of his firm in Copenhagen. A clerk brought in, fresh from the press, the first copy of a new novel, on whose pale green paper cover was an engraving of a boat, in heavy weather, tacking outside a Norwegian promontory. "You shall take this with you, if you will," said Mr. Hegel, as he wrote my name with *venligst og ærbödigst fra Forlæggeren*, "and make acquaintance with Jonas Lie." "And who is Jonas Lie?" I asked. "He is a Norwegian," he answered, "like our friends Björnson and Ibsen, and, though comparatively few people know his name to-day, I predict that in ten years' time he will have more readers than any other Scandinavian writer." The prophecy has come true, at all events so far as Scandinavia itself is concerned. At this moment

Jonas Lie is locally the most popular of the Northern novelists.

At the date I speak of Lie was already more than forty years of age. Jonas Lauritz Edemil Lie was born on the 6th of November 1833, in the country parish of Eker, near Drammen, in the south of Norway. At the age of five he was removed to the port of Tromsö, in the Arctic regions, his father having been appointed sheriff of that town. There he remained until he was eleven years old, enjoying an untrammelled childhood among the shipping of the little Nordland capital, and gaining acquaintance with the wild seafaring life which he was afterwards to describe in his early stories. He had a great wish as a boy to go to sea, and at the age of twelve he was sent to the naval station at Fredriksværn to become a cadet. His extreme near-sight unfitted him, however, for service, and after a few months' training, which was not lost on the future author of *The Commodore's Daughters*, he was sent to the Latin school at Bergen. There he remained until 1849. Two years later he went up to the University of Christiania, where Ibsen, Björnson, and Vinje were among his fellow-students, and ultimately among his friends. While these young men, however, early showed their native bias towards literary production, Lie displayed no such inclination. He pursued his

studies as a lawyer, took his degree in law in 1858, and presently settled down in practice as a solicitor in the small town of Kongsvinger.

Meanwhile the plays and stories of his early contemporaries were making them famous. Lie was seized by a spirit of emulation, and in 1865, at the somewhat mature age of thirty-two, he gave up his professional career, and came to the capital to try his luck as a man of letters. In 1866 he published his first book, a volume of "Poems," in which the influence of Wergeland was strongly marked. This enjoyed no success, and for the next four years Lie carried on a struggling existence as an obscure journalist. In 1870 appeared his first story, *Den Fremsynte* ("The Man with the Second Sight"), a melancholy little romance of life in the Arctic part of Norway, the world of brief lustrous summers and age-long winters. This tale was written in the manner which Björnson had brought into fashion, but it showed original features of its own, both in treatment and in location. It was full of memories of the author's childish days in Tromsö. He was conscious, however, that these memories needed refreshing, and in 1871 he obtained a small travelling stipend from the State, which enabled him to make a journey through Nordland and Finmark. From these Arctic provinces he immediately betook himself to Rome.

Den Fremsynte was well received in Norway, and Lie was now assured of literary work. But neither in his short stories, *Fortællinger*, 1871, nor in the novel which followed them, *Tremasteren Fremtiden* ("The Three-master 'The Future'"), 1872, did he achieve a complete success. *Tremasteren* was an attempt to give a realistic impression of life in the Arctic ports, but it is not artistically put together, and the movement of the tale is slack. At the age of forty, Jonas Lie was still far from being a distinguished man even in his own country. Yet as early as 1869 Björnson, speaking at a public meeting at Tromsö, had said of Lie: "His friends know that he only needs to dip the net down into himself to bring up a full catch." The image was an excellent one, for Lie's nature, during the varied experience of these apparently barren years, had been stocking itself, like a fish-pool, with every variety of living forms.

His first great book was that which appeared in 1874, and called forth from his publisher the personal expression of faith to which I have referred. The novel of *Lodsen og hans Hustru* ("The Pilot and his Wife") was written in a small mountain town in Italy. A comrade of those years has recorded that the composition of it was accompanied by so painful a nostalgia for the sea that Lie became almost ill with longing, and one summer day, throwing up his work,

trudged many miles through the blazing heat that he might kneel for a few moments by the lapping Mediterranean, and wash his eyes and mouth in the waves. This intense devotion to the sea, and this pre-occupation with marine instincts, gave a peculiar character to *Lodsen og hans Hustru*, which is one of the saltest stories ever published; it is odd to think that a book so full of cool foam and fresh wind should have been written in a hot Italian inland village. This admirable novel has appeared in two English versions, and has been translated into most of the languages of Europe. It deals with the adventures of the two homely folk who give it its name, and with life on the North Sea and in various tarry sea-port towns of Europe.

Lie's next venture was a drama in verse, called *Faustina Strozzi*, 1876, founded on a passage in recent Italian history. This is not regarded as a work of great importance. It really marks a crisis in the author's life. He was no longer satisfied with giving a romantic treatment to the seafaring life that he had learned to touch as a child. His ambition was to address a larger class of readers, with work produced on a more cosmopolitan basis. It was some time before he discovered that his talent did not lie in painting modern Italian life, nor even such Christiania manners as inspired his next two

novels, *Thomas Ross*, 1878, and *Adam Schrader*, 1879. In *Rutland*, 1880, and *Gaa paa!* ("Go Ahead!"), 1881, he returned to his original field—sea-life in the Norwegian merchant-navy, gaining by these two books, for the first time, the ear of the great public.

But the true importance of Jonas Lie as a student of human nature, and as the constructor of a strong and original plot, was first exhibited by his powerful novel called *Livsslaven* ("The Slave for Life"), 1883, which dealt with the toils and pleasures of artisans in the Norwegian capital; this is a gloomy and pessimistic story of a smith's apprentice, with his struggles for existence and his ultimate final failure owing to the irresistible indulgence of a passionate physical instinct. *Livsslaven* achieved a very great success; it was realistic, and modern in a certain sense and to a discreet degree, and it appealed, as scarcely any Norwegian novel had done before, to all classes of Scandinavian society. It was followed within a few months by *Familjen paa Gilje* ("The Family at Gilje"), another study of the sinister side of modern life, illuminated, however, by a genuine humour, an element which here made its appearance in Lie's works for the first time. Since 1884, Jonas Lie has published five novels: *En Malström* ("A Whirlpool"), 1886; *En Samliv* ("A Wedded Life,")

1887; *Maisa Jons*, 1888, the story of a sempstress; *Kommandörens Döttre* ("The Commodore's Daughters"), 1889, which is here translated; and *Onde Magter* ("Evil Forces"), 1890. He has also published in book-form a collection of eight short stories, *Otte Fortœllinger*, a new volume of poems, 1890; and a collection of twelve stories of seafaring life, called *Trold*, Christmas, 1891.

Like so many of the leading writers of Norway, Jonas Lie has been mainly a voluntary exile from his fatherland. He left Norway in 1871, and, except for a visit which he paid to his country in 1882, he has lived abroad ever since. After leaving Italy, he settled in North Germany, then removed to Berchtesgaden, in Bavaria, where he has a summer dwelling, his winters being spent in Paris. This prolonged absence from home is the more remarkable because his books deal almost exclusively with local types and local manners—are not merely Norwegian, but provincially Norwegian. It is the characteristic of the later and greater works of Jonas Lie that in them he has presented to us clearer and simpler aspects of Norse life than any other author. Without reaching the intellectual passion of Ibsen or the romantic tenderness of Björnson, Lie comes really closer than either of these more inspired poets to the genuine life of the Norwegians of to-day. As

Herman Bang reminds him, in the graceful essay of dedication which precedes Bang's volume of tales called *Under Aaget* ("Under the Yoke"), 1890, Jonas Lie has known how to present to us the solemn figures of the Fates, clad in the garments of to-day. He stands, as a novelist, with those minute and unobtrusive painters of contemporary manners who defy arrangement in this or that school. He is with Mrs. Gaskell or M. Ferdinand Fabre; he is not entirely without relation, in some of his books, to that old-fashioned favourite of the public, Fredrika Bremer. It would be a mistake to call him a great creative artist. He has slowly discovered his vocation, and late in life has secured an audience. His truthfulness, his simple pathos, his deep moral sincerity, have gradually conquered for him a place in the hearts of his countrymen and countrywomen which no one can dispute with him. His style, which is colloquial almost to a fault, presents certain peculiarities which the translators of the *Commodore's Daughters* have attempted to preserve. English readers may be pleased to read one of the most characteristic stories of a writer who is innocent of any "ism" and professes to teach no "gospel," but who is the best beloved of the living novelists of his fatherland.

EDMUND GOSSE.

THE

COMMODORE'S DAUGHTERS.

I.

A MARINE was preparing in the pale sunset to haul down the flag on the rampart of the dockyard.

Inside on the lawn lay two mortars, green with age and mildew, and half filled with rain-water, throwing their shadows almost to the verge of the gravelled space in front of the Commodore's dwelling, a grey one-storeyed house, with weather-cock and gables, and the tree-tops in the large garden behind visible above the roof.

The windows were open in the house of Commodore Witt, chief of the dockyard; the ebbing sunlight of the warm, autumn evening poured through the curtains, forming two golden streams of dust, which lighted the uppermost of the portraits on the opposite wall, and made the gilded list round the ceiling shine in places with a fiery gleam.

There were many people at the Commodore's this evening, and many uniforms resplendent with bright buttons. Above the window-seat appeared the grey heads of two old naval officers. In a soft, padded arm chair by the round table sat the Commodore's wife, a stately, imperious woman, somewhat inclined to *embonpoint*, wearing a heavy gold chain on her neck and bosom. There was a certain dignified fulness below the chin of the clearly cut face; and her whole bearing indicated a woman who had once had some pretension to beauty.

On the sofa, with another good lady, sat the wife of Captain Fox, knitting away untiringly.

Snugly ensconced on a lounge in the corner, some elderly officers were listening to the Commodore, as he discussed and abused first the Admiralty—the Commodore and the Admiral were always at loggerheads—and next the Marine Board; meanwhile, the piano was being besieged by some three or four lieutenants and sub-lieutenants. Cicely Witt, the Commodore's eldest daughter, was searching among the music for some songs, and the circle of officers around were paying her every attention. She and her sister Martha, some two years younger than herself, had returned home in the spring from three years' schooling at Kristiansfeldt.

At a little distance sat two midshipmen in full uniform, their left shoulders decorated by a fringed epaulet just gained at the recent examination. One

was leaning forward balancing himself on his chair, close to the old English clock which stood in its tall mahogany case near the stove; the other, absorbed in thought, was seated in a corner between a cabinet and the window-seat, where the ruddy, round-faced Laura Fox was whispering to one of her companions, and feeling a little piqued because the young man had his back turned to her.

Many hearts were beating to-night with hopes and dreams for the future.

Suddenly the room was hushed into silence while Cicely sang. Only from the next room were heard signs of suppressed laughter, and now and then through the doorway came glimpses of the slim, girlish figure of Martha, struggling with her sailor cousin Jan, who was trying to wrench an apple from her hand; the laughing, animated face and clenched teeth of the girl telling that the contest was a keen one.

The Commodore was not musical, but he resigned himself complacently to circumstances; only now and then when he forgot himself and began talking in a subdued tone, there came a speaking look, or a significant "My dear Witt!" from his wife.

The little bald-headed, garrulous captain with the fair oval face and scanty whiskers—Mrs. Fox's husband as he was called—began talking in a benign, half serious tone; while the fat navy surgeon, Clausen, stood in the middle of the room whistling to himself, and sketching in the air the outline of

Cicely's pretty head, neck and shoulders, as he stood behind her.

As for Lieutenant Fasting, he was entranced by the expression of her mouth. Her clear, fresh voice vibrated through the room; her method was so natural, so enchanting!

While he leant over her and turned the leaves of her music, he was busily engaged in keeping the song from sliding off the rest, and her merry nod of direction showed she did not spurn his rather clumsy help.

Then followed an eager dispute, for it appeared they were none of them agreed with regard to their various favourite songs. There was only one upon which they were of the same opinion; and the discussion waxed warmer and warmer.

While they were thus occupied in exchanging views, and in looking over the music, Mrs. Fox, seated on the sofa, whispered:

"You will not be able to keep her long, Mrs. Witt; I hear there are bets in the town as to who will be the lucky fellow."

Mrs. Witt's somewhat florid face did not for one moment betray the pleasure that she felt.

"Ah, but you know, dear Mrs. Fox, there are many roads to Rome! Your Laura with her sensible, quiet ways and amiable manners is just the girl to attract men; of that I am quite sure."

"My poor little Laura with her turned-up nose!"

sighed Mrs. Fox, modestly warding off the compliment.

"With her complexion and rosy cheeks she is more than pretty, my dear! Regular features do not count for much. Don't for a moment imagine she is one of those who will pass unnoticed in the world," said Mrs. Witt, playfully.

Mrs. Fox glanced searchingly at Mrs. Witt. Could there have been any gossip in the town about her Laura? . . . .

"You know," continued Mrs. Witt, "we sent our girls to Kristiansfeldt during their schooldays to keep them out of harm's way; we wished to steer them clear of any youthful love affairs. A mother must really use her eyes; young girls cannot be careful enough; they must go about and see a little of the world, and yet one must keep them within bounds, just as if men were imaginary beings, which is far from being the case!" She finished with a significant smile, patting Mrs. Fox on the arm.

Mrs. Fox pursed up her lips; it was now quite clear to her that she had been right in her surmise—it was really for the sake of her teeth that Mrs. Witt had paid her last mysterious visit to town.

The knitting pins clicked while her thoughts ran on. She remembered how good Mrs. Witt herself, in her time, had been the subject of gossip. There had been stories enough afloat about the times with-

out number she had been publicly and privately engaged, before she had settled down into married life, a somewhat faded beauty, with Captain Witt, then only a lieutenant, who was fifteen years her senior. Since then she had become strangely conscientious and strict in her principles.

"Come here, Karsten!" said Mrs. Witt, beckoning to her son, a handsome dark lieutenant with an aquiline nose and short bushy whiskers, unmistakably like his mother. He had just entered and walked in a somewhat nonchalant manner across the room, carelessly stroking his chin.

"I hear you have been out on leave ever since yesterday, yet your parents have only had the honour of seeing you here to-day!" she said, looking at him inquiringly.

"Good evening, Mrs. Fox! You hear how I am being brought to book," said he, nodding slightly to her.

"We took a trip into the country, mother! Bull, Storm and I, through the forest—such splendid moonlight." . . . .

"Ah, indeed! so you go out by night to admire the beauties of nature," said Mrs. Witt, in a tone which, though it was intended to be severe, was full of motherly forbearance, and not quite free from a touch of interested curiosity.

"No, not that exactly, but of course one didn't get much sleep," he remarked, stifling a yawn. "I have made up for it, however, this afternoon. Is there

anything else you wish to know, mother?" he asked frankly, as if prepared to unburden himself completely.

"No, thanks, my boy, I have heard quite enough."

Karsten moved away, and his mother exchanged a sly glance with the ladies around her.

"It is not advisable to meddle too much with the affairs of these young men, but one must appear to keep them in hand. . . . . Well, what is it, Karsten?" she asked, as her son at that moment leant over her chair.

Mrs. Witt looked in the direction of the piano, where Cicely stood in lively conversation with Lieutenant Fasting.

"Cicely!" she called, turning round in her chair, "I am sure there must be somebody over here who would like another cup of tea; you must look after *us* a little, as well."

Cicely hurried towards her mother, firing off a parting shot on her way:

"Oh, mother! you should listen to Lieutenant Fasting's German, he was completely floored just now, for I remember the exact page where the rule is to be found."

Just then, as she was rinsing out a cup at the tea-tray, a round object came crash down into the midst of the tea-things, upsetting cups and saucers, and rolling down on to the floor. It was followed by a terrified "Oh, but mother!" from the sixteen-year-

old Martha who, during her sister's discussion, had been bravely struggling in the side room.

Mrs. Witt drew herself up for a moment with a sharp look of inspection; then collecting herself she said: "Martha, how can you be so childish!"

Her eyes looked searchingly for the missile; could it be a leather ball, a ball of worsted, or what?

The next moment the young sailor, a smart, squarely built fellow with jet-black hair and eyebrows, rushed past Martha exclaiming:

"I am so sorry, aunt! It was I who threw it so awkwardly; Martha couldn't catch it."

"What a splendid apple!" said Lieutenant Fasting laughing, as he picked it up.

"One of my very finest!" cried Mrs. Witt, with a movement of impatience which she could not control.

"So transparent! one can almost see into the core," continued Lieutenant Fasting, examining the apple. Then, with a "Pray, take it" he handed it to Martha.

"Th—anks!" she answered, the word sticking in her throat. She hung her head under her mother's displeasure, but still could not avoid looking shyly up.

"It is not so easy to behave properly when one has a companion with hair as black as pitch," said the Commodore, consolingly.

"I think Martha had better go up to her room!" said Mrs. Witt sharply. "It is not good for young

girls to be up so late; we must keep to the school rules of Kristiansfeldt."

"There are breakers ahead, Martha!" said her father.

"Ask Captain Fox and your father if they will have some tea, Cicely," said Mrs. Witt, with a stiff smile, as she rose and disappeared into the next room.

The Commodore thought it best not to notice his wife's displeasure, so he continued his conversation with Captain Fox even more loudly and eagerly than before.

"Martha certainly deserves to be scolded," said Karsten in a superior way. "Mother's finest apple too; Jan, I think you must be mad!"

"It is too bad, but 'twas I who threw it at Martha, and she gets all the blame."

"Oh, don't trouble yourself about that, it will soon blow over," said Karsten, as Jan hurriedly quitted the room.

"Young ladies of that age must be kept under control, you know, Mrs. Fox," continued Karsten; "one cannot say her education has been quite finished at Kristiansfeldt. What do you think?"

"But Martha is quite a child of nature," replied Mrs. Fox leniently.

"You had better say at once she is like an unruly calf let loose for the first time!"

"Do you notice," he continued in a low voice, as he leant familiarly over the back of the sofa, "how

like she is to father in the peculiar way she holds her head and gives side-long glances? What she wants, she *will* have, just like father. . . . She'll never be a pretty girl—something between a scarecrow and a tub."

"Do not say that," answered Mrs. Fox, lengthening out her words; "she has a pair of remarkable eyes. There is a great change in the Commodore's house now the girls are grown up . . . . and such a lovely flower as your eldest sister. . . . ."

Karsten's attention was wandering. His eyes were on Cicely, who was again surrounded by admirers.

She was eagerly describing in a lively manner the stay at Kristiansfeldt; their conjectures about the outside world—how the schoolboys were barred in behind a tall paling; how they pictured them in their imagination—and what romances they had conjured up. The conversation by the window-seat was becoming more and more animated until Karsten came with an invitation to the card table:—"The Commodore wants two lieutenants to make up a game of whist."

The heavy gate of the dockyard creaked on its hinges and shut heavily on the departing guests. The Commodore was already on the stairs with a candle in his hand ready to go to bed.

Cicely was in the sitting-room putting the music

in order and shutting the piano. Karsten stood over by the window impatiently waiting for the housemaid to clear away the glasses.

"You can imagine this is very different to being at Kristiansfeldt, Karsten," said Cicely. "Every evening I imagine I am going up to the large, dark dormitory with the two rows of beds—with both the teachers to look after us."

"I wish the discipline had had more effect upon you," he answered, crossly. "I must say, Cicely, there is a good deal to be said about your conduct to-night."

"What do you mean?" she exclaimed with a start. "What have I done?"

"You behave more like a schoolgirl than a lady!"

The tone was that of the superior, dictatorial brother and the worldly officer.

"What nonsense, Karsten! Perhaps you would like me to give myself airs? . . . . No, I must really be allowed to be natural and not make myself ridiculous—here among friends and acquaintances."

"Indeed, then you count lieutenants and such newly made midshipmen as friends? They will no doubt feel very much flattered, but I tell you what, Cicely, I won't have any comrades of mine making fun of my sister—making a laughing-stock of her, to say the least of it. I should like to know what you think they are talking about and amusing themselves with to-night!"

"But Karsten!" she exclaimed, "this is too bad. .... What have I done? Tell me, tell me at once, explain yourself!"

"A lady does not permit gentlemen to stand leaning over her shoulders all the evening, turning her music backwards and forwards, while she is laughing and encouraging them. You may be sure a lady, like Miss Wally Wanckel for instance, would not allow it; she wouldn't for a moment risk such a thing!"

"You are quite right there," said Cicely, laughingly, while tears of vexation stood in her eyes; "I don't believe she would risk such a thing—first, because she's so stiff, and then because she is so ugly and tedious! If I am going to take her for my pattern, I——"

"That's just it. You believe you are a beauty; that like the sun you are the centre of attraction; and so you behave like a goose—or, if you wish me to express myself more elegantly, like a swan, which for the first time finds itself out in the middle of a lake, and lets itself be admired."

"Shameful! abominable!" she said, bursting into tears.

"Mother!" called Karsten in the doorway, "come here a minute. I can't get Cicely to understand that it won't do to sit by the half hour with her head buried in the music together with my good friends, the officers. I know them! You should

have heard the way she was talking! All her thoughts and ideas—and they seemed unlimited—about certain young men hidden behind palings in Kristiansfeldt! . . . . Why, hang it!" said Karsten, as he rose impatiently, "if you are pretty, Cicely, there are times when you are as stupid . . . . more stupid than . . . . Well, I wonder if you have any idea how my comrades are amusing themselves now by taking you off?"

Cicely threw herself passionately into her mother's arms.

"I am sure I don't understand what you mean," she sobbed; "it is shameful, horrible of you. . . . . I shan't know how to behave or what to say. I don't care to be with them at all!"

"Listen, child," said her mother, "you must use your own discretion; you are still so young—one cannot learn to know the world in a day . . . . I had thought of speaking to you too . . . . but Karsten is right!"

"Mother! . . . . Do you say so too?" she cried, losing courage, and looking searchingly at her mother.

"Every girl has, of course, her own way of keeping men at a distance," said her mother, soothingly.

"You will soon learn to steer through the shoals, Cicely," said Karsten, stroking her hair. "You need not cry on that account, but you will need a little piloting at first. Go to your bunk now, and think over

all you have been told, and you may be thankful you haven't nineteen or twenty just as stupid geese as yourself around you," he added in a good-humoured, joking manner.

Cicely wrenched herself from him and rushed out of the room.

Mrs. Witt had taken off her dress and arrayed herself in a snow-white dressing-gown and nightcap. She sat leaning forward, her broad, imposing figure filling the easy chair in which she had settled herself.

"You might have been a little more forbearing, Karsten . . . . but it is only right she should be frightened a little, and that her eyes should be opened . . . . a young girl should be as wary as a wild bird," said Mrs. Witt, with an experienced sigh, carefully stroking back her beautiful, curly grey hair under her nightcap.

"But after a time they become very worldly-wise birds, don't they?" said Karsten, flippantly; "the hunting then becomes mutual, mother!"

Mrs. Witt's dark, lively eyes rested with a certain pleasure on her handsome son. Remarks of that kind from Karsten always conquered her.

She sat slowly rubbing together her white hands, which sparkled with rings, comforting herself at the thought that she could keep him with her the whole winter.

"You will find yourself very comfortable at home,

Karsten. You can, of course, have your own parties and your own card-table quite independently of your father, and invite whom you like."

"Good promises, mother! But the governor has a most inconvenient habit of turning up everywhere."

"Oh, but he has become far more manageable of late, Karsten, I assure you; and besides, a son who is a lieutenant!—he must understand you are no longer a child—and then you know he prefers to retire early."

"But he has not the slightest idea he is enforcing any restriction on people," grumbled Karsten.

"I'll tell you what, dear boy," said Mrs. Witt, changing the subject, "I'm thinking of moving the sofa from the spare room upstairs into yours. It is large and old-fashioned, but very comfortable and nice—and will look very well; I'll go down to Printz's shop and buy a neat covering for it. Then up there you will be in your own territory altogether. . . . . And how nice it will be for Cicely to have such a brother to take her about this winter."

"Yes, I've no doubt I shall have my hands full."

"By the bye, Karsten, an invitation came yesterday for a party at Consul Wanckel's, at their country house. I took upon myself to say we would go, but I don't know what your father will say!"

"Do you mean he may turn crusty and make a bother about it?"

"That's just the difficulty. I must try and find a convenient moment; you know how he dislikes our making new acquaintances."

She looked musingly after her son as he paced up and down the room in the semi-darkness.—"Very nice people, you know," she continued, reflectively—"the good freights this year have made him a rich man. . . . . Wally Wanckel is now a regular gold nugget," finished Mrs. Witt, as if weighing the matter in her mind's eye.

"She seems to be well aware of it—a regular French fashion plate," hinted Karsten.

"Yes, she can afford to dress as she likes—a very womanly, sweet girl, isn't she?"

"They've got an awfully swell house," said Karsten. "I must say I do not see the wisdom or fun of staying away."

"Quite right, my boy," replied his mother, yawning slightly as she raised her portly, white-robed figure from the chair. "I must, of course, get your father to go. You can hand him over the invitation card to-morrow morning at table, Karsten."

II.

RUM—tum—tum went the piano in the sitting-room.

"Don't you think we could get leave to bathe to-day, Cicely?" asked Martha, breaking off in the middle of her practising.

Cicely sat by the window sewing, glancing now and then out of the window.

"Look at the lovely sunshine! The heat is quite stifling!" panted Martha. "Won't you ask, Cicely? Mother never says 'no' to you."

Cicely left the room; and Martha, with a renewed effort, began again practising her scales up and down the keyboard.

"Well?"

"We can't go; mother says the water is too cold so late in September."

Rum—tum—tum went Martha on the piano, striking the notes harder in her vexation.

"I wish we were back in Kristiansfeldt again! . . . . I think mother might have the bergamots gathered to-day. . . . . Why are you looking out of the window all the time, Cicely? Do you see Jan? It

will soon be dinner-time. . . . . Whatever is it you see out there?" said Martha, springing to the window—"Oh, it is only Karsten and father and Lieutenant Fasting. . . . . I wonder if Fasting is coming here?"

"I wasn't looking that way," said Cicely hastily, "and why should he be coming here I should like to know?" She drew back her head quickly at the same moment.

The lieutenant looked at them and saluted Martha with great cordiality, while she bowed in return, as to an old friend and acquaintance.

"Why did you hide yourself, Cicely?" asked Martha, teasingly.

"Somebody is going into the dining-room," she added, suddenly bouncing away to the piano.

Rum—tum—tum.

"Do you think it was mother?" asked Martha, listening for a moment.

"No, it is only Nella."

Cicely had now moved to the other side of the work-table.

"Do you think Fasting will come back again?" said Martha, putting her head close to the window and peering out as far as possible, her curly auburn hair sticking out on all sides.

"Really, Martha, I think you had better go on practising, and get it finished . . . . besides, you know I don't care which way Lieutenant Fasting goes."

"Wait a little, some one is coming!" continued Martha, still staring out from behind her sister.

Cicely leant quickly forwards and looked through the curtains.

"Oh, it is only fat Mr. Sörensen," she exclaimed, "how he does stump along . . . . and there is Jan," she added, her nose pressed flat against the window-pane.

"I'll open the window, Cicely; he can easily climb in . . . . Jan! Jan!" she called, beckoning to him.

"Are you mad, Martha? Will you shut the window!"

"No one is looking," said Martha.

"Nobody looking? Didn't Lieutenant Fasting go by just now, and besides—shut the window at once!"

A struggle ensued. Martha's thin arms tried bravely to keep the window open. It was just banged to as Jan arrived below, apparently not unwilling to comply with Martha's invitation.

He soon appeared in the room by the proper entrance, however, but he seemed to be terribly troubled about something, as his usually merry face was depressed and melancholy; the low vigorous brow betrayed only the deepest anxiety.

"What is it, Jan?" both asked alarmed.

He shook his head mournfully.

"When misfortune does come, it comes with a vengeance," he said sadly, taking a seat.

"But surely there must be a way out of it . . . . Is it impossible to put such things right?" he reasoned, apparently in great distress.

"What, Jan?"

"Dear me what a stupid fellow I am; hasn't the Commodore shown you the letters?"

"What letters . . . . from whom?"

"Oh, so you don't know. I see. Well then, perhaps it would not be quite right for me to let it out . . . . but is it impossible to mend matters? is it impossible?"

"But what is it then, Jan?" asked Cicely, shaking him by the arm, while Martha stood lost in bewildered amazement.

"There is no sense in marrying off young girls by lottery; but they say it is the law in Kristiansfeldt. Do you know if there really is such a law?"

"Only for the members of the brotherhood, of course," said Cicely.

"Yes, but the misfortune is that they have had a lottery and put you both in, as you were there at school."

"Put us in?"

"Yes, the letters came to-day. The Commodore is awfully put about——"

"Us?"

"——for I understand it is a sacred rite, which cannot be disputed—so the letter says."

"Us?" said Martha, looking disconsolately at Cicely.

"One of you, I don't know which, has fallen to the lot of the oldest member of the community; he is said to be eighty-two years old and very much in want of a nurse during the remaining years of his life, so runs the letter; while the other one has fallen to the lot of one of the brethren who has been married and has nine children. He is a manufacturer of snuff, and has seven large machines in which he grinds all the snuff required by the brethren and sisters."

"Oh, you story-teller!"

Martha recovered from her fright when she saw Cicely, just as much from vexation as from sheer relief, give Jan a well-directed box on the ear. He had really for the moment taken her in.

"So you thought you could make us believe anything so absurd! Is that the sort of thing you sit and ponder over at the Navigation School?"

"Ah! but you were terribly afraid of the snuff manufacturer, Cicely! There is no use denying it. You both looked for the moment as if you were married and disposed of;" said Jan, in great enjoyment.

"You can't take me in, my dear Jan; but I shall pay you out, be sure of that," said Cicely, sitting down with great dignity at the work-table.

There in spite of all she had said, she would have

an opportunity of seeing Lieutenant Fasting and greeting him, as he was returning from the mechanic's shop with a roll of papers under his arm.

Jan's mother was the Commodore's half-sister. His father, Dr. Börresen, from Nordfjord, had been drowned a few years ago while crossing the fjord on one of his professional visits:—a great blow to the family, which resulted in Jan, the eldest son, leaving school to go to sea. The Commodore had done a great deal for him; and now Jan was reading for his examination at the School of Navigation. As his resources appeared to be limited, the Commodore had invited him to take up his abode with them. Whenever the dockyard clock sounded the mid-day rest for the workmen, the sisters kept a look-out for Jan, who was expected home from the school. He generally put in an appearance as soon as possible, convinced that the three of them together would know how to pass the tiresome half-hour before dinner.

Mrs. Witt was helping the soup—a soup made of fish with bread dumplings and purslain—her son's favourite dish.

"Fish pudding as well!" exclaimed Karsten, greeting the new dish which was being brought in. "By the bye! we have got an invitation from Consul Wanckel to his country place . . . . I hear it is for us officers on the corvette . . . . a grand affair; tea, dancing, and plenty of champagne."

"Oh!" exclaimed Martha eagerly, "I suppose I

can go as well, if it is to be at the country house mother?"

"Don't worry me, child! It is settled that you are not coming out till next year," said Mrs. Witt.

"You must know, my dear Martha, you are really too green," added Karsten. "I've quite enough to do to teach your sister the rudiments of good behaviour."

"Thank you, Karsten!" said Cicely in a low voice, looking down at her plate; "your sister will not trouble you; I have no wish to go."

"Nonsense, Cicely!" interrupted her mother impatiently.

"No, I wouldn't go to parties if I were you, Cicely," said Karsten, in a bantering tone. "The men are really so bad in this wicked world—so obtrusive—so importunate—especially to you . . . . By the bye, I see they have provided a rubber for father."

"Indeed—so the pleasure-making season has begun again. Hand it to your mother," said the Commodore, pushing the invitation card across the cloth. "I, for my part, intend to be safely moored in my bed by ten o'clock," continued he, his grey-bearded chin moving rapidly as he ate.

"Well, my dear, that is undeniably the most comfortable plan," replied Mrs. Witt, "but I don't quite see how we, who are in duty bound to main-

tain a position in society, can give as an answer: 'No, thanks, we prefer to go to bed.'"

"My duty demands that I get up in the morning; that part of it which demands staying up at night you will have to undertake."

"But we must show that we appreciate the consul's attentions both to the service and to us personally. I suppose he is one of our richest shipowners now," said Mrs. Witt, laying stress on the latter argument.

"Well, well, be off! I refuse to acknowledge that I have any duties outside the town boundaries," rejoined the Commodore.

"Ah, well, perhaps we had better keep within the town boundary to-night too, and have a pleasant evening at home," said Mrs. Witt, in a mild tone of surrender.

The Commodore did not seem to have anything to say against that way of settling matters; he was busily engaged in picking fish bones.

"It will certainly be a very diverting time this winter for us and for Karsten, now that he has come home," continued Mrs. Witt.

"Karsten can certainly go if he likes!"

"And leave us?—No, I must really decline any such arrangement, Witt. You cannot mean what you say; it is heartless, to say the least of it. So inconsiderate!"

"Well, but mother, if father doesn't care to go with us"—— Karsten interposed.

"I beg your pardon, Karsten; your father is neither so old nor so decrepit that he need make use of excuses which might be becoming in a pensioner, but which, to say the least, would make us look ridiculous!" The Commodore drew himself up sternly; his sixty-nine years and the question of his resignation were his weak points.

"And Karsten certainly cannot excuse himself with your 'town boundary' argument, without becoming the laughing-stock of his companions," continued Mrs. Witt, following up the advantage she had gained; "but, of course, if you wish it, Witt, we must console ourselves at home as best we can this evening," she added, in an apparently resigned tone. The Commodore looked at her; a dangerous storm was brooding. He was evidently undecided in his choice between the "evening's comfort" and the "town boundary."

"I foresee plenty of dissipation, if Karsten is to idle away his time at home the whole season, while the corvette is in winter quarters," remarked the Commodore, severely.

A pause ensued, during which Karsten beat a tattoo on the table, and hemmed and hawed.

"You shall know my decision when I return from the dockyard this afternoon, Julia; you must be so good as to wait till then."

Mrs. Witt felt sure that the "town boundary" argument had fallen through, but she could not

resist a rejoinder to that side-thrust against Karsten.

"Idle away his time at home, Witt, you say .... Karsten? As if he isn't doing his duty in the service as master of ordnance—we ought to be only too happy and thankful to have him here with us."

"I say that all this merry-making ruins our young men—makes them effeminate; and they lose all ambition to push on in the world. If I were in Karsten's place," he continued with a sneer, "I should now be in the English, French, American or some other service, out in the world, gaining new knowledge, developing new ideas, in order that I might better my position at home. Instead of that, one must dance, flirt and be the lion of small society circles."

Karsten moved his chair with an impatient jerk.

"Witt! consider what may come of all this," interrupted his wife, in a significant tone.

"I don't wish to stop at home to be looked upon as a nuisance," retorted Karsten haughtily. "For the matter of that, I can go abroad into some other service."

"There, you see, Witt, what this leads to!" said Mrs. Witt, dolefully.

The very thought of her son, the apple of her eye, going into foreign service was death to her.

"I mean to say that a naval officer who really

wants to become a sailor must perfect himself, and get experience at sea," replied the Commodore. "If I were in Karsten's place, I would a thousand times rather accept the post of a lieutenant on one of the Government coasting-steamers up north, where one could very soon become captain, than lead the lotus-eating life he does here."

"Thank you very much, father; I prefer the French service to a dog's life on those steamers."

"May Heaven forgive you, husband! Must Karsten ruin his constitution by exposure to severe weather, draughts and damp up there, and contract rheumatism for the rest of his life? I must say you speak recklessly!"

"Oh, but I consider young officers ruin their constitutions just as much by loitering about, spending their salaries and doing nothing all the year round—wasting their time at billiards, restaurants, and all that sort of thing. I think they would be far better off on a regular winter cruise."

"But haven't you got one thought for me, Witt? Have I not only one son, and is he to be away on those dangerous seas? . . . . I shouldn't be able to rest day or night."

Mrs. Witt sat looking the picture of overwhelming reproach.

"You always fancy I shall be wrecked and go to the bottom, mother; but, to tell the truth, I've often meditated on a couple of years in foreign service; it's

all one to a sailor," said Karsten, with much bravado; "you know it would not be for ever."

"Yes, come abroad!" broke in Jan, eagerly. "I've never seen such men of war as there are in the harbour of Bombay; guns through port-holes big as millstones! And when they fired, it thundered like——"

"Karsten is fortunately not in a position to be obliged to sail to the other side of the world as a cabin-boy," interrupted Mrs. Witt, with an expression full of contempt.

"Julia!" hemmed the Commodore, as a sharp reminder.

Mrs. Witt, with a frigid smile, carefully folded her napkin, and placed it in its silver ring; then she pushed back her chair and, with a dignity as oppressive as the heat of an overfed stove, sailed out of the room.

During the silence which followed, the Commodore got up from his seat and went straight into his study, while Jan and Karsten disappeared in different directions.

That Mrs. Witt was not in a pleasant humour old Nella, who stood at the ironing-board in the girl's room, could tell at once by the impetuous pit-a-pat of her steps across the kitchen floor. Nella threw everything else aside, and began at once with the dress Cicely was to wear at the evening party.

"Put it all away!" was heard. "If you haven't thought proper to do it before, we don't want it slurred over at the last moment."

"But Madam ordered me to iron the curtains and dress-shirts on Monday and Tuesday, and then there was the window-cleaning; but the dress shall be ready in good time."

"You should have known that Cicely must have her things in order. A person who has been in our house twenty years ought to know a little how to manage, I should think, that something may turn up at any moment. But it seems I must consult you first, before I can go out for the evening. Such bad management! Now, thanks to you, Cicely will have to stay at home or wear her dark everyday dress. Put it all away . . . . I do not know that we are any of us in the humour to go," she added, by way of finishing her reproaches, as she swept out of the room.

Nella's most expressive feature was her mouth, which, though usually nervous and troubled, was now full of quiet, stubborn determination. Her head was bent down as she struggled hard with her work. During the friction of many years peculiar tactics had been adopted by the two. Mrs. Witt's forte lay in the aggressive, Nella's in the defensive. Mrs. Witt resembled a hurricane, which after spending itself in sudden gusts and squalls, subsides; while Nella, for the moment upset, would resort for the

rest of the day to the most obstinate implacability; inaccessible to even the most delicate approaches. That she was quite indispensable had been proved in a series of crises, which had at one time resulted in notices to quit—notices, however, which had always been recalled.

It was a moral necessity for Mrs. Witt to know that everything was in order, and in a polished, bright, presentable condition; if she could have fixed the clockwork of the universe with screws, it would have been her ideal of perfection. Nobody but Nella could wash and dust and put things tidy; so that at last it had become Nella's second nature to see that everything in the Commodore's house was properly spick and span; and to keep it so was the one ardent ambition of Nella's life.

Busy and full of cares, she bustled about the house, and was, so to speak, a family chest in which all the family stowed away their little ill-humours and vexations. She was the general confidant of the house at the same time, the hiding-place in which they buried all their secrets, good and bad.

Her silence, in the nature of things, was taken for consent; no one for a moment imagined that contrary opinions could ever cause friction or confusion in her brain.

Nella attributed the same vital importance to everything in which she was concerned, whether it

were a family trouble, or a shirt which had got creased in the ironing. – – – – – –

Silence and depression reigned while the family drank coffee. Mrs. Witt sat on the sofa, from time to time making use of her smelling-salts; while the girls moved stealthily about the room whispering quietly to each other. Karsten sauntered about listlessly, cup in hand, whistling. Jan gulped down his coffee and went out.

"It is a wonder he had the good sense to go at last," exclaimed Mrs. Witt, irascibly. "It is quite irritating to feel those eyes upon one the whole time . . . . and then fancy having such a tar in the house, and at table the whole winter; he doesn't understand his position at all; he allows himself to have an opinion, because he is related to us. . . . . Take a cup into the study, Cicely; put in the sugar and cream. You can make your father happy by telling him that none of us are going out this evening. I have a headache coming on."

"If the governor says much more, I shall be off to England," said Karsten, evidently finishing aloud a train of vexatious thought. "To suggest that cruise up north—hardly fit for a dog!"

He was determined his mother should understand that it would not be his fault if he stayed at home.

She sat and sighed; the situation tortured her like a vice.

"But why should it be necessarily one of the steamers in the north?" she said, cautiously seeking an outlet for her thoughts; "why not here in the south, my boy.... on one of the Government boats?"

"As second in command? At best a sort of gilded slavery .... but where isn't one a slave?"

"Not before the spring, of course; then it wouldn't be so bad, Karsten!" pursued his mother, becoming more and more eager.

A bright thought struck her. If Karsten took such a post, she could see him every other week when the steamer called there, and the threatened danger of foreign service would be at an end.

When Cicely returned there was quite a change in the atmosphere. Karsten appeared to agree with his mother's way of thinking; she seemed greatly taken with the new idea, and spoke of his father's influence, and wondered which steamer would be best.

"I see you standing on the bridge, Karsten, waving your gold-braided cap to us over here at the windows, and your father with his glasses, on the rampart looking out for you. . . . And then how nice for your mother to go to Kristiania in your steamer!"

"I say, Cicely dear," said Mrs. Witt, interrupting herself, "just run out and see if Nella is very cross. Tell her you are going to wear your lilac dress this evening, and that I depend on her to see to the gophered skirt. Ask her to put something aside for

father's supper. Be pleasant to her, take some coffee out with you and one or two rusks."

Jan could see very plainly that Martha had been crying when she came out to watch the others drive away to the party.

Mrs. Witt kept loading her with injunctions up to the very moment she entered the carriage: Martha must do her lessons and then go to bed—no strumming on the piano (Mrs. Witt had the key of that herself). Jan must help Nella to carry in the flowers from the garden steps, as it was sure to be cold during the night.

"And you will have your supper up in your room, Jan. You have lessons enough for to-morrow, I suppose? Nella will give you the latch-key at nine o'clock. . . . . And you, Nella, must tidy up and put things in order," finished Mrs. Witt, putting her head out of the carriage, as it rolled away, to give the last order.

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Should they stay indoors and have a game of battledore and shuttlecock, or play quoits out in the yard? Just for a little while—or pick currants in the garden?

Martha shook her head to all that Jan proposed; it would be best to sit down and do her French lesson. "Or, Jan! shall we run down to the boat

and row on the canal—only for a short time, before it gets dark?"

There was nothing she enjoyed so much as a row; he could get the oars and unchain the boat, she would run across to old Olsen the foreman, and get the key for the chain.

She ran off, tying her hat on the way, and had already been to the foreman when Jan came trudging along with the oars on his shoulder.

The workmen had left the dockyard, and the last beams of the sun were still shining on the gables of the yellow sheds where the gunboats were housed. On the ramparts the five or six signal guns threw their long shadows across the greensward. They lay there mounted on their old-fashioned carriages, with wooden boxes covering the touch-holes, their muzzles pointed outwards as if to protect the harbour, where two dismantled men of war lay at anchor.

They would have to hurry if they wanted to row. On coming to the boat they found it half sunk and filled with water. While Jan stood and baled out the water, he could not help wondering at Martha's strength.

She was pulling the heavy, water-logged boat towards her by the chain. Her intention was to get her foot on to the big hawser fastened to the hull of the brig which lay moored to the quay, waiting to be roofed over for the winter. She tried again and again.

"I'm off!" at last she cried, balancing herself dexterously.

"Now I'm off, Jan!" came timidly. She had ventured on the hawser, past the double knot which seemed to hinder her retreat.

"If I fall, Jan, you must look out!" she said tremulously. She stood still, daring neither to go backwards nor forwards, then with sudden vigour she dashed forward.

"Jan!" she shouted when safe across and out of danger: she had seized hold of the bundle of faggots in the hawser-hole of the brig.

"Try to do that!" she shouted exultantly from the gunwale.

"I can tell you, Martha," he answered irritably, while he threw away the scoop; "it was a wonder you didn't fall down into the boat and injure yourself."

"Don't stand there scolding; but be quick and finish baling, and bring the boat across."

"No, now you can stay and have a look round the brig."

"Come here at once, do you hear! . . . . Come, I say!

"You had better stay, and take a lesson in navigation."

"Oh well, it's really very nice on board here—I don't think I care about rowing now," she said resignedly, humming as she walked about. . . . "By

the bye, I think I must hurry home and learn my grammar."

"No, the boat is dry as tinder now, Martha," he cried, coming alongside with the boat.

"Ah ha! you had to come!" said Martha, teasing him as she jumped down into the boat. "Let us row up the canal; I will take one of the oars."

She sat down on the stroke thwart, set her teeth, and pulled with her oar till the water foamed under the blade, while he went on sculling.

"Jan," she cried suddenly, ceasing rowing with her face flushed with the exertion, "I had such fun this afternoon with Mr. Devold. Since he was made sub-lieutenant, he is always glancing at his left shoulder where he wears his epaulet. He came strolling in such a lackadaisical way up to the garden gate where I was standing, and began; 'I suppose you are going out to a tea-party this evening, Miss Martha?'"

"'That's just where you make a mistake, Mr. Devold,' said I, by way of thanking him for his kind inquiry.' You should have seen his face then; it became as long as a fiddle. He stood gaping and seemed quite at a loss. But when I said: 'I am not going, but father, mother and Cicely are;' his face became radiant with joy and happiness. He coughed and stuttered and tried to appear as if he hadn't come simply for the purpose of finding this out; then wonderful to relate, off he walked.

How immensely amusing these love-sick fellows are; they roam round, and hang about, as if nothing were the matter. Lieutenant Devold is the sixth who I know is smitten with Cicely; that is to say, seriously smitten. First of all, there is Lieutenant Fasting."

"Yes, he is the foremost among them all; any one can see by the look of him that he is a man."

"I should think that could be said of Karsten also," retorted Martha, huffed; "and you say Lieutenant Fasting is the first."

"Yes, I'll stick to that, Martha," said he, "and then the old Commodore. I say, what a fine fellow the governor would have been if he had only made more use of his limbs. You are a bit like him about the shoulders, Martha."

"I?" she exclaimed with asperity.

"Karsten is only a nicely rigged long-boat which his father wants to fit out as he himself would like to have been. But Karsten is not that sort of man."

"I tell you, Karsten——" she began, bridling.

"He would soon become water-logged and go to the bottom, if he was to knock about as the governor wishes. The old man is only mad because he has not gone about enough himself."

"I think you are rude and ill-mannered too," broke in Martha. "You heard what was said at dinner."

"Yes, they wanted to bundle him into the steamboat traffic."

"I want to go home, I tell you! Turn round, I want to go home." She pulled hard with her oar and turned the boat.

"But, Martha, you must know——"

Martha did not answer.

"Karsten may be a very good fellow for all that; he is, you know, an extremely able officer."

"Thanks—perhaps you'll allow me to go ashore."

"And he is very kind too; only he's a little—just a little too much of his mother's son, and a bit of a dandy," Jan unfortunately added, as the boat reached the landing-steps.

"Many thanks for your good opinion of him, Jan!" said Martha, curtseying with great dignity from the top of the steps, and then starting off home.

"Martha! . . . Martha!" he called, but Martha only hurried on.

"Martha!" he called again; "you know we can't go up to the house like this."

She only ran the faster. "Like this?" . . . . She felt she must turn round for one look; but that was sufficient to bring her to a full stop. Jan was racing after her with her hat on his head.

"I thought you wanted your hat, Martha?"

"Thanks, give it here."

'But I can't get the beastly ribbon untied, I as-

sure you. In the hurry I made a regular old woman's knot. I'll be hanged if I can get it off."

"Don't tear the ribbon, I say—— Mother will be angry, do you hear? I'll undo it."

She untied the knot under his chin, and began playfully to set the hat first on one side of his head, then on the other. Then with a sudden "Oh, fie! How ugly!" she pulled it off and ran away.

At that moment old Nella thrust her head out of the parlour window, peering keenly round.

"We have only been down by the canal for a little, Nella."

"I tell you what it is, you will be getting me into trouble some day. A nice row there would be in the house if Madam knew how you attend to your studies, Jan. And you, Martha, who were to do your lessons and go to bed."

"But mayn't I sit up in bed and read a little, while you wait up for the others, Nella—just for half an hour!" begged Martha.

III.

If any sailor round the whole coast went about longing for the breaking up of the ice, that sailor was the old Commodore. He thought no winter cruise with its dog-watches could be worse than these balls and parties after Christmas. He was of opinion that all this feasting and merry-making was a great misfortune both to the world and to domestic happiness, and that besides ruining the service, it was the cause of many early deaths; but this bitter conviction of his he kept under the seal of silence. A full disclosure would have led to a rather violent breach of domestic peace with his wife, with the sole prospect of having to yield in the end. And so he preferred to sail on with closed port-holes. This evening another ball—the second that same week! He had seen the dressmaker establish herself in the sitting-room after dinner, and, knowing what was coming, he had gone upstairs in a bad humour to take his mid-day nap.

Down in the sitting-room the bustle of getting the evening dresses ready increased hourly. All sorts of light, transparent tulles and ethereal skirts were spread about over the chairs, tables, and sofa,

and watched with Argus eyes and cries of anxious warning, if Karsten or Jan, on their passage through the room, happened to approach them, even at three paces' distance.

Mrs. Witt's finery, and lace-covered silk dress occupied three chairs placed at equal distances one from the other.

"A parcel from Kristiania for aunt!" said Jan, rushing in. He had taken possession of it down by the dockyard gate.

Mrs. Witt tore it open.

"Whist! is that father on the stairs? Run and take him the newspapers, Martha! Don't you think, Jan, you could find a better place than here, among our dresses and starched things?"

An impatient movement of her hands and an expression of annoyance plainly betrayed that she had made up her mind to a disappointment. She was expecting a new head-dress from Kristiania together with a few other things she had ordered and had taken much trouble to ensure their coming in good time. And now her milliners had been obliging enough to compel her to appear in a cap she had worn before this winter.

Nella was at once despatched for small trunks and bandboxes.

Should the flowers on the Copenhagen cap be arranged on the white gauze one, or should she use the feathers bought in Hamburg?

Mrs. Witt rummaged and ferreted among the things in the various round and square boxes, choosing some and rejecting others. The table looked as gay as a flower bed with its litter of gauze, flowers and cap-trimmings scattered around in wild confusion; while Mrs. Witt herself was busily engaged in selecting materials, every now and then appealing to the dressmaker about the alterations and changes.

"What do you think, Miss Mathisen, about the combination? I have been wearing flowers all the winter. There is this much to be said for feathers——." Mrs. Witt did not think proper to finish her sentence, but held the cap at arm's length, viewing it critically.

"Certainly, feathers give dignity, but then they add—age."

A troubled expression in her eye betrayed an inner struggle before she finally fixed upon the feathers.

"And I think my dress can very well bear being taken in a little at the waist, Miss Mathisen; it is almost an inch too wide. I suppose Cicely has begun to dress herself, Nella?"

Cicely trembled involuntarily as she thought of the approaching ball; it made her turn cold all over; to her strong nature it all seemed so strange.

It was like magic; they always appeared before her; those small, keen, blue eyes; that merry beaming face always full of good humour and sunshine; that head which always towered above all others.

But she could not help laughing when she thought of how she had danced and talked and seemed so taken up with Lieutenants Storm and Devold, that her mother had reprimanded her, and all this only to attract attention from Lieutenant Fasting. How stupid they all were; first, her mother, then Karsten, although that might pass: but then Lieutenant Fasting. She hardly knew if she dare behave like this any longer; she could see by his eyes how angry he became. But then, again, how merrily they beamed when she afterwards made fun of the way in which Lieutenant Storm danced.

No, she really did not know if she dare go on like this; he had said so seriously that last time: "I did not think you were a coquette!"

"Oh, how stupid all men are! I believe he wanted me to say straight out that I preferred dancing every time with him!"

How like a feather she felt in his hand, and yet she knew she was anything but a feather; none of Commodore Witt's children were that.

How innocent and indifferent he had looked when they were drinking coffee before they parted the last time. And one of her gloves was missing; she could have staked her life that he had stolen it—she was quite certain of it—and it was one of that beautiful pair Karsten had given her; she wouldn't let her mother know anything about it for the world!

"No, indeed," she exclaimed indignantly to Nella, who, with one of the candlesticks beside her, was kneeling on the floor helping to arrange her dress. "You won't get me to wear this tulle round my neck." So saying she flung a light fichu on the bed, casting a side-glance at her splendid shoulders in the glass.

Nella protested as best she could, with her mouth full of pins.

"But mother said you must," interposed Martha, watching with glowing interest the progress of her sister's toilet.

"Pooh!—just because Karsten thought of it. No, thank you."

"Mother said you would catch cold."

"It's always Karsten's everlasting—— These fellows, he is always talking about. I am so tired, so dreadfully tired of it. Just as if they would die at the sight of a pair of arms and shoulders! One can scarcely move on account of them. Ugh!" she said, petulantly stamping her foot.

"Do stand still, Cicely!" ordered Nella, "and let me get you ready. Madam may be calling you any moment. Is the skirt the right length, Martha? There are enough evil thoughts and tongues in the world, which a young lady like you can't know anything about," she continued, mysteriously. "They swarm around a young lady like flies round a bit of sugar.

"Let them swarm!" said Cicely, throwing back her head; "I am not made of sugar."

Something rankled within her, however much she tried to calm it down and hide it; however much it disappeared in the excitement of the dance, the conversation, and the compliments. She had rushed, as in a whirlwind, from ball to ball this winter. But her newly-born confidence in herself had received a blow that night, when Karsten had taken her so severely to task, and her mother had put her seal of approval upon it. However much she might forget it in the whirl of the ball, and in the anxieties of anticipation, it came back to her, making her tremble and shiver; it returned when she was continually being rebuked and reprimanded, if only as a momentary apprehension of her mother's and Karsten's.

She looked into the glass once more a little doubtfully and critically; then she exclaimed: "I will not wear the tulle!"

"We'll hear what your mother says," insisted Nella.

"Very well, then, Nella, I shan't go at all!"

"Hm—m—m!" came defiantly from Nella's lips, still full of pins. "Karsten will soon tell you what's best."

She went on carefully fastening the skirt.

"How muffled up she will be about her neck, Nella. I wouldn't go like that," said Martha.

"It has all been well considered—I'll answer for that," replied Nella, reservedly, taking pin after pin from her mouth, while she arranged the dress.

"You may be sure that question has been well considered;—one hasn't to dance in a church. Does it set right now?" continued Nella, looking at the dress, and moving her head from one side to the other.

"I will not go! Karsten doesn't find it at all wrong for Wally Wanckel and other girls—and then to come and tell me that it is to prevent my getting a sore throat! Fancy going there wrapped up like an old woman!"

"Hush! mother is coming," whispered Martha.

Outside the door could be heard the crackling of starched shirts. Mrs. Witt entered, her silk dress pinned up around her, a candle in her hand. Nella must help to fasten down her lace collar.

"I will not wear the fichu, mother," cried Cicely. "You don't know how ugly I look in it!"

"Nonsense, child! Bring it here, Martha."

She scanned her daughter's white ball dress by the light of the candle.

"Good heavens! if Martha hasn't gone and sat herself down on it!" ejaculated Nella; and began spreading and smoothing it out with her hands. "How it is crumpled! And the bows!"

"Nella, Nella!" somebody shouted from the landing. "Nella! . . . . Are you all ready? Can I

come in?" continued the voice, which was Karsten's, while with one hand he held a white waistcoat in at the door.

"Nella has washed and starched this waistcoat without taking off the buttons. Just look at the spots of iron-mould from the steel rings; she must be in her dotage!"

"Bless my heart, Nella! You must know that you ought to take off the buttons," said Mrs. Witt, angrily.

"It must be on board ship where they do that sort of washing," answered Nella, quietly, with a touch of offence, while she continued smoothing out the fichu. "I have put two freshly starched waistcoats in his drawer; will the Lieutenant please see if there is any rust on them? That waistcoat there has been taken out of the trunk."

"Is Cicely going to show herself off bare necked again this evening?" asked Karsten, seeing his sister.

"It's no use talking of any fichu now," retorted Mrs. Witt, irritably; "Martha has taken care to spoil it. Put it away, Nella."

Martha sat rocking to and fro in her chair, letting the scolding glide over her bent head.

Nella was busy putting to rights Mrs. Witt's handsome lace collar, glancing from time to time at Cicely; while between the two sisters a suppressed merriment, occasioned by telegraphic communications, was threatening more and more every moment

to be too strong for Martha's natural tendency to laughter ; at the best of times the many dimples in her face made her look mischievous enough.

Mrs. Witt leant backwards, watching with half-closed eyes her own stately figure in the pier glass while with both hands she smoothed down the bodice of her silk dress over a waist which was no longer slender.

She glanced from herself to Cicely, who pressed forward beside her to arrange some flowers in her glossy hair.

Cicely was charming this evening ; there was no denying that ; such a splendid figure . . . . but—and Mrs. Witt drew herself up—she had not her mother's aquiline nose ; there was more of the Commodore about her. The firm, solid shoulders and arms were magnificent.

She forgot to finish her survey of Cicely, in order to feast her eyes on her son, who entered in his becoming blue naval uniform with the splendid epaulets, which gave such a manly appearance to the figure. Her lively eyes beamed with satisfied pride. Here were to be found her dark hair and aquiline nose, arrogant almost to impudence. He came to tell her the Commodore was walking up and down impatiently waiting for them below.

Mrs. Witt stood with her violet silk dress gathered round her ready to start. Nella was helping them on with their overshoes for the journey, while

Cicely had turned round to give herself a last survey.

"Heavens! it is cold!" exclaimed Karsten.

The next thing was to get the valuable freight properly packed and stowed away in the sledge.

As soon as they were gone Jan and Martha turned backed the dining-room table-cloth and began—playing cards.

"Only another quarter of an hour! Only ten minutes, Nella!—till the clock in the parlour strikes half-past!"

They had begun by bargaining for half an hour and Nella, who was busy, came rushing in now and then to say that it was time to leave off.

Martha was telling Jan about Cicely's dress, and the wonderful satin shoes which hadn't arrived by the post till late in the afternoon; the old ones couldn't have been worn; they had been used four times. . . . . "All in white!" she finished, appealing to his judgment.

"It was I who put down the jack!" reminded Jan. His somewhat feeble reply in no way stifled her enthusiasm. She told him about the fichu, and how it was only Karsten who had put mother up to it.

"Can you understand why she should not have her dress cut low, like other girls?"

"She ought, of course, to have been put in a sack," said Jan meekly.

"Well, I'll tell you what, Jan. When I go to a ball nobody will get me to wear a high-necked dress! Perhaps we ought to wear a pelerine like Nella when she goes out to drink tea and to gossip."

"Your turn to play. At present you'll have to be satisfied with staying at home and playing cards with me."

"I say, Jan," she said laughingly, looking behind for her train, and putting on the airs of a lady. "Next winter it will be Cicely and I!"

"Yes, of course."

He felt a strange emotion as he looked at her.

"Yes, of course," he said again, deep in thought; "then I shall be gone."

"That's provoking, isn't it, Jan?"

"Ah, yes!" he answered, with bitterness. "It will be very pleasant, when I'm far out at sea, to be thinking of everything ashore here."

"That's a long way off yet; don't let us talk about it."

"Ah, that is what you say."

"Don't talk about it—do you hear! It is tiresome."

"When anything is tiresome you can let it be; you are in a position to do so," he grumbled.

"I shan't play any more. You don't care how you play, Jan—you only throw your cards away."

"Oh, what is the good of it all! I may work for ten years, and yet have no money to invest in a ship,

so as to be my own master." Jan stroked back his hair, as if in a perspiration. "It is as though I were drifting out to sea altogether!"

"Yes, I should like to go with you, Jan, if I were only a——" She would have said "boy," but suddenly something seemed to stop her, so she turned it into:

"But father can help you! . . . . Just a litttle longer," she cried impatiently to Nella, who appeared again in the doorway. "You must let us finish the game."

"To become captain of somebody else's ship, with the likelihood of being discharged at some one else's pleasure! There are many who think it a very fine position; but what do the people in this house think of a captain of that sort? Ah, well, you don't understand that."

He threw down the card he was playing with such force that it spun round.

"That's all nonsense you are talking, Jan!" she exclaimed vehemently. "Why, you are related to us!"

"You believe it is only Karsten; but your mother, and Cicely, and you too, when it comes to the point, think so."

"I? not I—you know that very well, Jan."

"You don't know what you'll think later on, Martha. A captain of a merchant-vessel is so looked down upon by these naval officers, that they can

hardly see him through a spy-glass. These fellows get their grand airs from swaggering about and showing off their clothes, as if they were little kings on board ship and in the dockyards. . . . . If anyone talks of having been at Bombay, or Melbourne, or the Pacific, on the other side of Cape Horn, they turn up their noses, because the thing wasn't done in man-of-war style, with saluting and thundering of cannon! Fasting, of course, is an exception. He wasn't too grand to lie across the yards, that fellow; he sold his uniform, and shipped as a sailor from Melbourne to England."

"Tell us about it, Jan, and we will put away the cards; that will be much better fun."

"Well, you mustn't think that the merchant-vessels out there are so very small, either. Those that trade with the Pacific, or with China or Java for rice, are no smaller than men-of-war, and just as grand, fore and aft, I can tell you! There are saloons, with looking-glasses and gilding, and bright chandeliers and brass-work, on all sides. These captains make as many thousands as captains in the Navy make hundreds. But that does not make any difference: they are looked upon as common traders anyhow," he said bitterly.

"None of your sailor-stories at this time of night! Not if I know it!" said Nella sharply, appearing on the threshold.

In this way they kept putting Nella off, from time

to time, until the hands of the clock pointed to half-past ten.

Nella had by this time finished putting the house in order, and had begun her knitting, which she intended to sit over, indulging from time to time in a nod, until, late on in the night, she had them all home again, and the dresses and finery put away in their places.

"Come Nella, and I'll tell you how we caught an albatross in a fishing-net and stuffed it."

"No, indeed ; it is high time you were both in bed. You must stop now, Jan."

"Oh, you might let us sit a little longer. I shall only be at home this winter. Martha will be going to balls next winter, and I shall be at sea. Martha will be a fine lady then, and I a rough, common fellow again."

A strange look flitted across Martha's face.

"You can imagine it won't be very agreeable to be an outcast again. What? Do you think so?"

"Oh, no. But why trouble about that now?" objected Martha, faintly.

"No, that's true. Why should we trouble now? I was just thinking of such a nice evening down at Cape Town. It was awfully warm : we had taken the cargo on board ; so in the evening I walked up to the parade near the docks, just as I was, in my working clothes, and sat down on a bench under some windows. . . . . It was so delightfully cool

there, and I could hear the people in the house laughing and singing, and playing all sorts of tunes on the piano. I felt so strange, sitting there, watching the beautiful stars, which were just beginning to peep out over the trees, and listening to people enjoying themselves, so far away on the other side of the world. I felt quite foolishly touched, and did all I could to hear through the window, which stood open. Suddenly a pretty young girl put her head out, and shouted in English, 'Mother, just come and look at the ragged fellow from the docks, who is sitting dozing under the window.' Then a dozen heads appeared at the window, quite terrified, and the window was banged to."

"You should have taken off your cap to them, Jan."

"That's just what I did; and after giving me another look, I heard them shut the front door and bolt it with a heavy bar. There was nothing else to do then but to be off and go on board, and dream sweetly about it all."

"You should not go such long voyages, Jan!" exclaimed Martha, piteously.

"Thanks; but when I do go I intend going far away. I want to become something useful in this world; if not, I don't care if I go to the dogs."

Martha's face here began to show signs of emotion.

"And what will it matter? You will be

dancing and enjoying yourself none the less here at home."

Martha had tried to keep the thought away from her—the time was so far off; but now she gave vent to her pent-up feelings, and burst into a flood of tears, sobbing violently, because Jan, her only companion and best friend, would be so far, far away all the winter—perhaps for years and years. The despair of the situation overwhelmed her.

"How tiresome it all is! how annoying! . . . . I shan't care for it at all! . . . . I will not go to balls! . . . . I won't go to a single one with them; it's all such a nuisance!—that it is!"

She went over to the window and looked out into the darkness. "You talk so horribly to-night, Jan!" said she, trying to recover her equanimity.

"There, you see, you have been sitting up too long," said Nella, irritably. "One ought to try to forget that sailors have to go away to sea again; why not make yourselves happy while you can?" she said, comforting them. "For shame, Jan! To sit there torturing and plaguing the child! Every position in life carries its own worries with it."

Jan tried to look penitent and unhappy for what he had done; but a bright expression gleamed in his eyes, showing that at heart he felt immensely happy.

"But when the sailors come home again, Nella—

what then?" said he cheerfully. "When one has been all round the world, sleeping in deck houses, and in the steerage, and longed for somebody at home for two years, and hardly been able to get more than a letter at the consul's all the time . . . then just to see the house in the distance and the steps up to the door! It all swims before one's eyes;—and then to steal quietly upon one's people, afraid that some one may appear at the door or look out through the window."

"Yes, indeed, Jan!" joined in Nella, quite taken with the subject, "how we did scrub upstairs and down from the day we got that letter saying you were on your way home. If the buckets could only talk! . . . . Madam was never satisfied; she wanted everything to be just as clean and polished as on board ship; she didn't mind how often a thing was done. . . . Ah well-a-day!" here Nella sighed in a mysterious way, "there's many a poor unsuspecting body goes about rejoicing at the thoughts of her husband's return, while he is deceiving her in every port. . . . But I think you have lost your senses," she said suddenly, "how long are you going to sit on here? What do you think Madam will say? I will go upstairs with you now, Martha, and light your candle."

It did not occur to Nella to think of her own comfort or close her own eyes, till every one had come home and gone to bed. During this busy winter,

with its balls and parties, she had knitted two or three pairs of stockings more than she had calculated upon. She knew there was no need for her to sit up and wait for Karsten ; yet she felt uneasy, and could not avoid starting up now and again in her sleep and listening till she heard the click of the front door as he bolted it behind him, and all became quiet again.

A few hours later in the night, Martha lay half awake watching Cicely, who was taking off her cloak and overshoes ; there had been a heavy fall of snow.

An odour of perfume filled the room, and she heard in her half-sleeping condition how Nella came and went, and how she said Mrs. Witt was already in bed.

Cicely stood flushed and heated before the looking-glass, taking from her shoulders and bosom all sorts of stars, ribbons and flowers, while Nella unlaced her dress.

"Are there any left still? Do look, Nella. I don't know where I got them all. . . . I had scarcely time to sit still five minutes."

She looked thoughtfully at her reflection in the looking-glass and at the carnation fastened in her brooch : "Lieutenant Fasting is no dancer, you know, Nella . . . . but for a cotillon !"

To talk to Nella was the same as talking to her-

self; and now, when Martha suddenly sat up in bed, they made a trio.

"How was Wally Wanckel dressed? . . . In silk, in white?"

"Yes, Karsten opened the cotillon with her, and danced with her almost all the evening."

Martha began to titter. "I was only thinking about something, and Lieutenant Fasting—how many times did you dance with him? I suppose he managed to engage you for all the square dances?"

"Not at all, he prefers to talk—to talk sensibly, you know. But no sooner has Karsten finished dancing with Wally—than he sits her down by the side of mother, that she may talk to her, and then he always goes off into a corner with Minka Krog."

"Had Wally a fichu?"

"She? . . . . No—although she needed one badly, she is so thin and bony. . . . But ugh! it has been quite a torture to me all the evening to feel Karsten watching me. I kept thinking to myself: Am I doing anything wrong? Am I saying anything wrong? Everything I did was wrong! For propriety's sake he made me dance the cotillon with him; I suppose I had been talking too much to Lieutenant Fasting. . . . You can take away all those flowers, Nella. . . . Do reach me a glass with some water in it."

Cicely placed the carnation in it.

"Ah-a-ah!" said Martha, mimicking her sister as she inhaled the smell of the flower; "it does smell beautifully! I know where you got it from."

"Nonsense! lie down and go to sleep. What a tiresome child you are!" said Cicely, prevaricatingly, as she placed the glass on the dressing-table.

"But what did Lieutenant Fasting talk to you about so seriously?" came shortly afterwards from Martha, meditatively.

Cicely did not answer. She remained standing with the bodice of her dress in her hand. Lieutenant Fasting's voice and the ball-room music still haunted her.

"Yes, if Karsten had only known what we were discussing, he would have felt inclined to cut off my head with his sword."

"Ah indeed—what was it?" asked Martha, burning with curiosity, resting her chin in her hands.

"He must have thought I was a flirt," went on Cicely soliloquising. "Lieutenant Devold and I amused ourselves during a dance by rushing past all the others; you know he dances uncommonly well. I couldn't help laughing at Lieutenant Fasting; he sat there looking so furious when I returned."

"But he doesn't dance particularly well himself, you know, Cicely."

"He doesn't trouble a bit about that!" said Cicely,

with superiority. "He thinks of something else besides dancing."

"Ah indeed! so he goes to balls to think about his shipbuilding on the stocks yonder?"

"No, I don't think he gave much thought to that this evening—but where else can he meet those with whom he wishes to talk? People cannot get to know each other through such silly talk as the remarks one generally makes when all the world is sitting round watching. I quite agree with him in that."

"Yes, indeed!" said Martha eagerly, "people do talk such stuff—about promotions, and about the trouble they have with everything; about their housekeepers and their servants, whom they are always running down; and then they speak of their butter, and the high price of meat; and what they have heard about any one who is ill—that Captain Meyers has liver complaint!"

"Young people don't care for anything serious," sighed Nella; "they prefer to dance over it."

"Young people don't wish to do that at all! but they wish to talk about what interests them," said Cicely decisively; "Lieutenant Fasting is more than serious enough, I can tell you. He told me about the new lighthouse which he had helped to build, and about all the things he intends doing. All at once he asked me if I understood what an ugly salmon-baiting affair such a ball was."

"What did he mean by that?"

"Oh, he meant that the men bow and scrape and make love to the ladies," said Cicely, somewhat impatiently—"they snap at the flies, he said, and all at once find themselves landed in an engagement,—then that fellow is done for, for life! By the flies he meant, of course, the ladies."

"Men have always a way of backing out," remarked Nella, "but the women, poor things——"

"Hush, Nella, don't preach!" burst in Martha, beating her pillow impatiently, "I cannot hear what Cicely says."

"One needs great courage to get married, he said. One knows what one gives—oneself with one's soul and body, but what does one get in return?—a risky game! . . . ." went on Cicely, as she shook out her tresses, now freed from all hair-pins and ornaments. . . . "He said he wished every one had panes of glass in them, so that we could see into each other's hearts."

"There's a great deal in that," broke in Nella, "one ought to look carefully before leaping into that gulf."

Cicely passed the brush vigorously through her hair.

"Any one that I believe in, I believe in thoroughly!"

"And what else did he say? and what did you answer?" asked Martha, with some curiosity.

"Oh, we spoke about so many things," said Cicely,

dreamily. "He said he would come to-morrow afternoon and take coffee with us—if I would allow it. But this doesn't concern you, Martha."

"Pooh!" answered Martha from her pillow, with a great pout. She felt this was terribly like a real love-affair.

IV.

THE next day, shortly before noon, Karsten was walking up and down the parlour.

He was looking decidedly cross and bored, as if he had not slept enough. He had made a night of it after the ball with his companions, and it was five o'clock before he had gone to bed. He would have preferred getting his proper amount of sleep by taking another couple of hours rest, instead of going down to the parlour where he risked being laid hold of by his father, who was always on the alert to find something for him to do. But he felt he had a moral duty to perform. He had become more and more irritated last night, as he went on drinking. His sister Cicely certainly required overhauling!

The rattling of tea-spoons and cups was heard in the breakfast-room.

"Some coffee must be taken up to mother in her bedroom," exclaimed Martha, rushing into the room.

With creaking boots and his uniform jacket open Karsten paced up and down, working himself more and more into a passion.

Suddenly he opened the window; he had seen Lieutenant Grundt making a halt outside. That meant something:—Grundt wanted to steer clear of the Commodore.

"So you are up already?"

"Ye—s . . . . ah—h, ye—s."

"An awful spree last night, wasn't it? I only wanted to tell you that down at my place there are plenty of things to recruit yourself upon: salted salmon, herrings, caviare . . . . eh?—a little aquavitæ, lager beer, &c. Falkenberg and Storm are there."

Karsten stood a moment irresolute; but his duty as a brother got the upper hand. With a feeling of self-satisfaction he looked at his watch:

"Thanks!—but I'm afraid you must have patience and wait for me at your place . . . . only about three quarters of an hour. I shall be there at half past twelve precisely. Don't begin till then."

"All right, I will call for Bennecke in the meantime—I think we shall get him to put his name to that bill when he's sufficiently merry. We'll have to make ourselves very agreeable to him."

"H'm—he's an unpleasant fellow, that's certain."

"Can't be helped, if the paper is to be renewed. His name will go down like butter."

"Ugh! don't talk of anything greasy."

"Then think of the caviare and the aquavitæ instead . . . . . Au revoir," and Grundt walked off.

Karsten looked after him; the air at the window revived him.

A door opened and quick steps were heard in the next room.

"Humph! . . . . are you going to make an exhibition of yourself to-day, Cicely?" he asked, sarcastically. "You look so confoundedly smart."

He saw at a glance she had dressed herself with more care than is usual the morning after a ball. The dark tight dress she wore to-day fitted her splendidly, and harmonised well with the somewhat pale face and abundant chestnut hair.

"You are always in a bad temper the morning after you have been out anywhere, Karsten! . . . How the boys are shouting and tumbling about on the ramparts! It has been snowing heavily in the night. What glorious weather! Just look at the big snowball they are making; I should so like to go and join them."

"You exaggerate everything, Cicely. I cannot even console myself by calling it affectation. You've just returned from a ball, and yet you wish to be turning head over heels with the youngsters out there in the snow. If that isn't going it, I——"

"How remarkably sweet you are to-day, Karsten!"

"Pleasure is always the first consideration with you."

"It evidently is not so with you."

"Well, that's chiefly your fault, Cicely. No, I

don't mean any nonsense to-day. We had plenty of that last night at the ball. When a young girl has been dancing and larking with the fellows as you did, and has amused them too, she ought to rest on her laurels."

"I shall just leave the room if you go on like this, Karsten. It seems as if you have a mania for scolding me every time I have been out enjoying myself. I don't want to be corrected by you at all; to tell the truth, I don't believe you understand a bit what a young girl's ideas are, or what she ought to do."

This was said with a feeling of self-assurance which was not without its effect on Karsten. It made him pull himself together; he felt he must convince her that he was in the right.

"Cicely," said he in a brotherly tone, "I have put off joining Grundt and some others on purpose to tell you what is on my mind. You ought to understand that I intend speaking seriously to you—I don't want to pick a quarrel. There are things which no one but a brother can speak of—at any rate, you are not likely to hear them from any one else. . . . . To speak mildly, this irrepressible exaggeration in everything you do destroys all that is ladylike in you, your whole dignity—do you follow me? . . . . . When you dance, you give yourself up to it in a way which is simply improper. A lady doesn't dance in that vulgar way as if she were at a servants' ball."

"I won't listen to such things, Karsten."

"Yes, let me have my say. When you talk it is as if your life depended on it; you must always be so candid, even to laying bare your inmost thoughts. People do not go into society to tell all their private affairs; do you think fellows carry nothing else about with them but what they can pump out of a young simpleton like you? You must restrain yourself, and learn to be more careful in your manner, otherwise you will only get yourself into disgrace. The world is not so innocent and sincere as you seem to think; those ideas you must throw overboard . . . . And then to sit down in interesting confidential conversation with a circle of gentlemen around you! You look as if you were swallowing every word they say as gospel truth, and they, of course, amuse themselves by seeing what they can venture to say to such a remarkable creature. You ought to know it is the ordinary flippant society talk which they have used many times before to such simple young persons as yourself, and which vanishes like air when they get to the toddy-table. Well, well—don't take it so much to heart! But it wouldn't be a bad thing, if you were to hear for once what a doubtful interpretation is put upon your naïveté, and the kind of things that are said about you; that might cool down your ideas a bit."

The apathetic way in which Cicely looked at her

brother showed plainly that she had for the moment felt herself under the influence of such a "cooling down."

"It's abominable!—abominable! that you should stand there and talk to me like that. That they should really go straight from me—after looking into my eyes as they did, and turn everything I say inside out. What can one think!" she exclaimed, losing her self-control. "I suppose men are human beings whom one can talk to in a natural way."

"There now, of course you must needs work yourself into a passion! You ought to understand it is for your own sake I try to enlighten you a little, and not for mine."

"If I thought that any one could make such a fool of me, and affront me in such a way, I——"

"There you begin with your exaggerations! One does not affront people at balls, one only flirts; you will not try to see that it is all foolery and nonsense. There isn't a bit of seriousness about any of it."

"I would rather they put their tongues out at me."

"Yes, I am quite willing to believe that; what a natural, unconstrained tone there would be if you had your way—but a lady, you see, my dear sister, never forgets what is *comme il faut.* She behaves in such a way that people cannot talk about her; you know how they will talk, if they can."

There ensued a pause broken only by Karsten's steps as he paced the room.

"Do your friends talk in this way too?" she asked suddenly.

"Well do you imagine they cannot be allowed to criticise?"

"Does Lieutenant Fasting also — —?" she managed to asked.

"He is no different from the others, of course."

"And you also, Karsten?"

"If I heard any one say anything about my sister which I did not like I don't know what I would do," said Karsten, thumping his chest; "one is naturally very particular on that point, I must tell you. Otherwise," he added with a frank laugh, "when one is with Romans, one does as Romans do. You must remember, however, that I am a man, Cicely, and—but no, I shan't go into any further details."

He buttoned up his coat and looked round for his hat, quietly humming the while. Cicely, left to herself, sat as if turned to stone.

Shortly afterwards Karsten passed the window; he was almost running and seemed to be in a great hurry.

"She has at last begun to understand," he thought to himself. "But it's a beastly job for a brother to have to drag his sisters out of their fool's paradise!" he muttered, as he ascended Grundt's stairs.

— — — —

So Lieutenant Fasting was no different from the others.

Cicely was sitting in her bedroom thinking over all that had happened—what Lieutenant Fasting had said, and what she had answered. She reviewed scene after scene with searching suspicion.

Ah! if only she could believe in him thoroughly, with the same confidence as last night, then all this horrid misunderstanding might be cast to the winds. What did she care about it, if she could only be clear about *him*. But he too had talked about not trusting to appearances. She saw his genial smile as he sat by her during the cotillon.

That smile—were there two meanings in that?

She also saw the sly gleam in his eye, which had so often made her laugh; perhaps he was double-faced like the rest.

Now she saw only the shady side of the ball. Traces of derisive cynicism appeared in their faces; she saw herself jumping and dancing among them, little suspecting in her enjoyment that the men were meanwhile exchanging significant glances. Her belief in mankind went up and down like a see-saw.

In feverish heat she attempted to recall his face as she would like it to appear; without that other expression which made her so unhappy. But it only became more and more painful; Lieutenant Fasting was no different from any of the others!

At this moment Martha put her head in at the door.

"Cicely, be quick, and come down. Lieutenant Fasting!" she said, hurriedly.

Cicely in reply only shook her head.

"He has brought such a lovely blue crocus for mother."

"Indeed?" said Cicely, as she raised herself on her elbow. "No, I shan't go down. He has brought it for mother; she can thank him herself."

"Oh, nonsense, make haste, do you hear? The coffee has been taken in already, and mother said you were to come down."

"You can say I have a bad headache; that's just as true as anything else."

"What a nice reply!"

"Mayn't I even be allowed to be ill?"

"But, dear, you told me yourself that Lieutenant Fasting had asked your leave to come."

"Oh! no one takes such ball conversations seriously. Just say I have a headache. . . . No, wait a bit," she said, half rising from her chair. "Don't say that my headache is very severe; only tell mother in his hearing that I am tired and don't want any coffee."

"Why should I say that?"

"You must, do you hear? Oh!" moaned Cicely, burying her face in her hands, and bursting into tears.

Martha looked at her, and then slowly walked away. She did not deliver the excuse in a very natural manner, but if Lieutenant Fasting did not quite catch the words, he guessed the truth from her tell-tale face.

Martha's sympathy had been awakened, and she fancied there must be something serious at the bottom of all this. She felt quite sure it must be the Lieutenant's fault.

The change which came over his face did not escape Mrs. Witt. He answered several times in a very absent manner before he collected himself and was able to continue the conversation.

With her experienced instinct she guessed at once that something was going on between her daughter and Fasting. The excuse indeed showed that Cicely understood the art of standing on her dignity.

She felt the same pleasure at discovering this that a mother bird might feel when to her surprise she sees her fledgling fly for the first time.

She looked at the young man more closely. She took a kind of motherly valuation or inventory of him.

His appearance undoubtedly did him credit; he was not exactly a handsome man, but his sinewy, manly form inspired one with confidence. At that moment he did not seem to be in a particularly agreeable frame of mind; and it would have been unwise for any one to approach him too closely.

"Are you really going already, Lieutenant Fast-

ing?" said Mrs. Witt, in a tone of regret, as he began somewhat precipitately to make signs of departure. "Not another cup of coffee? Karsten will be home soon. You don't know how pleased I am with the crocus—a blue one, too. I must tell you," she went on as she nodded a motherly farewell to him, "that I like to see young people attentive and amiable to old people like myself; it isn't a bad sign."

Lieutenant Fasting had thought of nothing but Cicely since he had left her last night after the ball, till this afternoon when, full of anxiety and nervous depression, he had entered the Commodore's house.

He saw her standing before him with the two rosebuds in her dark chestnut hair; how vivacious and expressive was her face; how she had smiled at him. He had become like a new man under the spell, and had gone about as if in a state of intoxication till this afternoon when, after knocking rather loudly at the sitting-room door, he had heard Mrs. Witt's voice, and had taken her quiet "Come in" as a good omen.

He had believed his fate would be decided to-day, if not by the straightforward decisive question, at least by her eyes and her manner. He had set his mind on asking in such a way as to compel her to give an answer. And then!

With his coat-collar turned up over his ears against the snowstorm, he found himself an hour later tramping along the slushy country road in the twilight.

"What a fool I am," he exclaimed, "and yet when I was talking of her to Krog and Angel, and expatiating on her charms, she looked at me so sweetly with those trustful, searching eyes, and smiled in a way that would mislead the wisest man, to say nothing of such a plain salmon as I. Is she a regular flirt, I wonder? . . . . Hang it all! I am not the only one who has been taken with her; there are twenty of us at least, so I suppose there must be something in her. No, *they* may be mistaken, but she does care for me—she *does* care for me." Here he came to a standstill. "She cares very much indeed."

He set off at greater speed.

"But, of course, there is a good deal of difference between caring for one, and taking one for life, a chain cable with two shackles. She would have to be as madly in love as I am to do that. She has had time to think over it, and got scrupulous, in fact, since last night."

"What does she really know about me? And perhaps if she heard all I had to tell her, she would pray God to preserve her! Humph! I really think the surest way will be to speak out like a man."

"How pretty and sensible she is; how pretty and sensible," he repeated. "A fellow drags through a lonely existence, and shuts himself out from the world, and then comes a time when he believes he has found some one who understands him, and in whom he can confide, who will put up with all his faults."

"But—to link herself for life to a person whom she can never get rid of again!".

"One must, indeed, be as desperately smitten as I am to venture on that . . . . and if she has thought it over, there can be nothing unreasonable in it—or she may, perhaps, mean something, although she is not ready to jump into the sea for me at the very first word, poor girl. That only shows she has a little sense left——"

"Or—h'm . . . . I see—perhaps it is the mother who has had the sense. . . . . Very likely it is Mrs. Witt who has put some obstacle in the way——"

Here his face brightened considerably.

"That's it!"

He went along the road pondering deeply. It was Mrs. Witt who occupied him most.

She was so exceedingly friendly over the coffee—and he was a fool not to see there was something at the bottom of it all.

But then she had invited him to come again!

V.

CICELY WITT and Laura Fox were coming out of Printz's shop, where they had been buying ribbons and gloves. The two girls turned hurriedly round the corner, fighting their way against the biting north wind.

They slackened speed considerably as they approached a little red corner house, in the frosted windows of which the tops of glass jars with bonbons and sugar plums were visible. On the side shelves of the shop the girls caught a glimpse of cakes and confectionery of various kinds.

They stood a moment hesitating. "Perhaps they haven't got anything nice to-day; let us go past and look."

Their faces were beaming with merriment.

"Yes, there they are—the apple tartlets—on the counter—can't you see them, Laura? I am sure they are just out of the oven."

"If we only had Martha to run in for us!" exclaimed Laura; "they can see us from all the windows up the street; you may be sure they'll say we go in to meet the midshipmen there."

"Pooh! I don't care! No one from any of the schools comes this way before eleven, only let us make haste. We can very well eat one while they put the others in a bag, which we can carry in our muffs."

So saying, they slipped quickly into the shop.

Afterwards, heartily pleased with their skilfully executed manœuvre, and still munching the remainder of the apple tartlet, they turned hastily round the corner, nearly running against Lieutenant Fasting. He gave the ladies a formal salute, but the expression of his face changed as he discovered in Cicely's eyes —not only the surprise which they communicated, but a roguish confiding look, which caused him to cast a significant glance at the confectioner's shop, as a sign that he understood the secret.

Cicely felt as happy as a bird; she was so relieved. This little meeting was a reconciliation between them. During these last few days she had gone about with a heavy heart, and had had no peace since that afternoon call, when she had heard the front door close behind him.

"Annoying, wasn't it, that we met Lieutenant Fasting?" said Laura; "I suppose he'll tell the others now that we go there to meet the midshipmen."

Karsten and his mother were alone in the parlour when they returned. Martha signed to them not to enter and disturb them.

"Can you imagine what is the matter, Cicely?"

In the parlour sat Karsten with his elbow leaning on the table.

". . . . Wrong; now tell me, mother, is it any use repeating it? Of course it is wrong. If I cannot get the paltry twenty pounds I want for the instalment, they will without doubt come down on the Commodore with the bills. Then there'll be a row! By Jove, he takes everything as if doomsday was coming. . . . . If he hears that I have mortgaged my salary besides, he is just the man to make such a scandal that I shall be disgraced before all the officers. He cannot make allowance for anything."

"You mustn't talk like that about your father, Karsten."

"Well, mother," said he in an off-hand, superior manner; "there is such a thing as upholding the prestige of the profession. But all this is beyond the comprehension of the governor; he only makes himself ridiculous with his moralising funeral orations, and it all sounds so confoundedly ungentlemanly."

Karsten stretched out his legs and looked discontentedly at the ceiling.

"I really think, Karsten, you should not worry me any more with your money troubles!"

"Oh, yes, that's all very well, if only every one were wise. But being born a gentleman I can't go about like a beggar; and besides, mother, you haven't exactly trained me to be so particular about every

penny. You know you always wanted your son to be good form."

"Karsten . . . . do you upbraid me because I have loved you so much?"

"Oh, I do not upbraid you for anything, of course. I only begin to get tired of staying at home," said Karsten, pulling his whiskers.

"Karsten!"

"You see how it embarrasses me in so many ways. Not even a small debt, without risking the Commodore's pleasant interference."

"And now you blame me for never thinking of anything but of what can give you pleasure and happiness. Yes, that's what you meant," said Mrs. Witt, piteously.

"Indeed? I am speaking about the twenty pounds; you always change the subject. It is impossible to get you to keep to the matter in hand."

"You know I require all the housekeeping money."

"For the matter of that there is no hurry about paying your bills for dresses and millinery in Kristiana; those people won't at all mind waiting another quarter; the Commodore's name is security enough."

Mrs. Witt became absorbed in deep thought, nodding her head slowly.

"Well, I shall have to order a velvet bodice, or

something of the sort, so the account can stand over, and be paid later on."

Her face brightened considerably.

"Your father really inquires so much into everything now, and asks if everything is paid, that it is no easy matter to stand in *my* shoes, Karsten. I have to take a great deal upon myself for your sake," she sighed resignedly, leaning back on the sofa.

"I believe the old man is not so particular in his inquiries when they concern you, mother; partly because he knows the consequences . . . . and partly because, like the rest of us, he's rather proud of you."

"Ah, you humbug!" she said, screwing up her eyes and laughing meaningly; "the misfortune is that you are not made to live on a lieutenant's pay, Karsten; there is something of the well-to-do man about you."

"What the dickens is the use of that when one hasn't anything to be a well-to-do man upon?"

"In the long run you'll be wanting something more than my poor housekeeping money. You are one of those who ought to have a horse and carriage and a servant to wait on you."

"H'm! if I went away and began to work hard somewhere, I might be able to become somebody. I often feel a great inclination to do something useful."

"Don't talk like that, Karsten! How many gain anything in that way: you have not such a revolutionary nature as your father. It would be a pity that your best years should be spent in hard work and slavery; I should feel as if you were lost to me —and," she added in a nervous strain, "I am not the only person who would miss you. . . . Tell me, now," she asked suddenly, "are you really as attentive to Wally Wanckel as she deserves? There is no doubt she has been greatly taken up with a certain young gentleman this winter."

"Don't you think you suffer from hallucinations, mother, where I am concerned?" said Karsten, cutting her short. Just before this unpleasant affair had been broached, he had been wondering whether he should venture up to the Falks this evening, where he was sure of meeting with Minka Krog.

"My dear Karsten, don't disparage your mother's powers of observation. I assure you Wally is a different person the moment you come in, she becomes so quiet and *distraite;* otherwise she can be most entertaining and sensible."

"Oh, mother, she certainly is not *entertaining*."

"But, Karsten! twenty-five thousand pounds are not to be despised."

"No—o—no!"

Karsten's handsome face assumed a harassed expression, and he passed his fingers thoughtfully through his curly hair.

"Well, well, mother," he said, somewhat crossly; "I see very well you don't wish me to fall in love with any one—so you will have me all to yourself."

"Ugh! you are really too tiresome," she moaned. "This has been indeed an unpleasant and painful morning!"

She carefully pushed back her grey curls with her knitting-needle.

"I think you had better ask your friends to come and have a game of cards with you this evening. I will ask Nella to get ready half a dozen ptarmigan for your supper? What do you think?"

"Well, why not?—the usual set, I suppose—Grundt, Falkenberg, and Bull, or Fasting, perhaps?"

While the family were spending the evening round the large lamp in the sitting-room, the young lieutenants were playing "Boston" in the adjacent room with the door open. Quick repartees and satirical remarks uttered in a low voice were heard from time to time from their quarter, and, as Mrs. Witt remarked when she passed the table where the punch stood, they seemed to be playing very high and to be in very good spirits.

"It's your splendid punch, Mrs. Witt," complained Lieutenant Bull. "I would not possess the receipt for making it for anything; it makes one play so badly."

"Ah, indeed," said Mrs. Witt, shaking her head,

"it appears to be the privilege of young gentlemen to play badly."

"Within reason, within reason," added Karsten, throwing down a card, and holding up his glass to his mother. "Thanks, mother."

Mrs. Witt maintained her stately dignity even when pouring out the punch. Her lace-covered wrist with the massive chased bracelet, and the white hand with its numerous rings sparkled against the side of the bowl. With some of the humour which in earlier years had made her so fascinating she said slowly:

"Reason generally comes with age—so too does ill-humour."

"I drink your health, Mrs. Witt!" exclaimed Grundt; "no one needs forbearance more than I. What punch!"

Grundt and Falkenberg had a pleasant and playful way of employing their conversational powers among the ladies in the sitting-room between the rubbers.

Cicely was in great spirits, and was continually carrying on some animated dispute with them, so that at last Lieutenant Grundt was obliged to get Mrs. Witt to take his part. She succeeded in appeasing the contending parties with her indulgent motherly ways.

"Young girls are very obstinate, you know, Mr. Grundt; at least mine are terribly so."

Her daughter's pretty defiant ways became her admirably; Mrs. Witt was not blind to that, and there was something imposing in the graceful curve of her neck, which reminded Mrs. Witt of her husband But Cicely seemed to lack that gentle, indescribable manner which every woman ought to possess.

Jan thought he could guess why Cicely was so rebellious and excited this evening. She could see Lieutenant Fasting in the next room every time he leant forward to deal round the cards.

Jan sat somewhat in the background, in the shadow, cracking nuts on the cover of a navigation book, which he afterwards used as a tray to carry round the kernels to the ladies. He was feeling much annoyed at the way in which they teased Martha, and made her flush up by treating her so much like a child. He and Martha were constantly carrying on a lively interchange of opinions, his eyes sparkling mischievously, and he availed himself of every opportunity to interrupt the conversation by offering Martha a selection of his best kernels. These attempts were, however, put a stop to by a severe look of reproach from Mrs. Witt.

At this moment Lieutenant Fasting entered the room. Martha could not help glancing first at Jan and then at Cicely; she felt inclined to burst out laughing when the lieutenant, who was no light weight, sat down on a fragile cane chair, which creaked under him.

"Are you making a design for your embroidery, Miss Witt?" said he, leaning towards her, "it looks as if——"

"Yes, but unfortunately I cannot get it right. The 'C' looks too big for the 'W' when I try to combine them."

"Will you let me look at it? Kindly lend me the pencil."

He hesitated a moment, with the pencil in his broad hairy hand, as if to find a convenient way of using it, and sat awhile making a few imaginary sketches in the air before drawing the design. Cicely anxiously watched his movements. Their heads were close together. Martha hardly dared to look up at either of them; she went on assiduously with her sewing.

"Do you think this will do?"

Cicely felt the blood mounting to her cheeks as she looked at the design he had drawn for her monogram. The "C" was encircled round the "W," but about the latter were some flourishes which made it appear like an "F." She became paler and paler as she bent over her embroidery.

"Are you pleased with it?" he murmured in a low voice, rising from his seat as he was called back to the card-table.

Cicely was trembling all over; she tried to smile. She managed, however, to say "Yes," and looked up shyly into his face. He walked away hurriedly, but

looked back when he reached the door, as if to obtain another glimpse of her.

Martha stole a glance at her sister. Cicely's countenance was beaming with joy and happiness.

— — — — — — — —

The Commodore had been in an extremely pleasant humour the whole evening. He had settled down on the sofa to smoke his pipe and read his paper by the light of his study-lamp with the green shade.

By-and-by he put aside his pipe, and sauntered through the open door into the card-room.

The players became still more animated on his approach, for they well knew that the Commodore would begin a severe criticism on their play. The leads were accompanied by witty remarks, and the talk assumed a jaunty, swaggering tone, while Karsten impatiently watched the clock. It would soon be time for the old man to go to bed.

Falkenberg's distinguished aquiline nose showed increasing signs of dissatisfaction, while Grundt began to feel nervous, as the Commodore took up his position behind him, and watched the game. He soon took a chair and sat down.

What a remarkable hand the fellow had! . . . . Surely he knew he had only to keep back the knave and he could score eight tricks! But, of course, he could not think of such a thing as interfering.

When, with a sudden sharp twist of the hand,

Grundt played the knave, making it whirl round on the table, he felt a sudden gust against his neck, which argued anything but flattery.

The Commodore was an expert card-player, and his "Hums" and "Hahs" buzzed round Grundt's ears every moment, till the latter, in great vexation, and burning with "consuming passion," as he afterwards expressed himself, made such a stupendous blunder that the Commodore rose in silence and went back to his own table.

"By Jove!" said Karsten to himself, in a great rage; "if he isn't actually beginning to read his papers again!"

Karsten felt his position as host assailed. He rose, and going to the door, said:

"Mother, we intend saying good-night. We are going to spend the remainder of the evening up in my room. Hope you can send us a new supply of punch, as I haven't much up there to offer my friends."

"Of course, my boy. I'll send some up; and Jan will help you to arrange the card-table."

"H m-m!" grunted the Commodore, from his place in the corner. "It's eleven o'clock, I see—quite time for people who have any work to attend to to go to bed. I will say good-night to you, gentlemen."

The Commodore rose, took the lamp in his hand and made a short bow to Karsten's friends.

"Really, Witt," exclaimed his wife indignantly, when they had left the room, "have you considered for one moment how impossible it will be for Karsten to invite his friends here, if they are treated in this way?"

"I don't think he will be the better or the worse off on that account. He will always be what he is —a dandy and a coxcomb, who loafs about and makes a fool of himself. Why couldn't his friends remain here in respectable company?"

"You know, Witt, young men have a lot to say to one another which is not exactly fit for Cicely and Martha's ears—or for mine," she added, with dignity.

"Oh, indeed! Nothing but indecent, foolish talk about women and the rest of it?"

"Hush!" reminded his wife. "Please bear in mind that your daughters are in the room, Witt."

Cicely was standing buried in her own thoughts, with her embroidery and the sketch in her hand, ready to go. Now she glanced at her father with an intent and searching look.

The light of the study-lamp fell on his thin, sharp features and short grey whiskers. He was evidently trying to control the passion which was raging within him; he was mumbling to himself, after the manner of old men.

"I don't like the idea of Karsten becoming an idle,

good-for-nothing fellow," he said, sharply. "If only there were some substance and vigour in the life he leads! But I see nothing but frivolity and petty vanity. I can't understand how you can encourage anything of the kind, mother."

Very slowly, step by step, Cicely mounted the stairs on her way to bed. The dim lamplight threw up her shadow as she moved along the passage at a leisurely pace, apparently wishing to catch some of the rather loud conversation in Karsten's room, which she had to pass on her way to her own and Martha's chamber.

Peal after peal of laughter came from the room; and between these she discerned the deep, decisive voice of Lieutenant Fasting. He was no better than the others, Karsten had said.

She stopped and listened anxiously, but the next moment she recovered herself, and hurried past the door.

Cicely had heated the bolt for the quilting-iron, and had fastened it to Nella's ironing-board. What with the stove and the ironing, the girl's room was warm and comfortable. The sun was shining with dazzling brightness on the great snow-heaps outside the window.

The morning had not been a peaceful one. Mrs. Witt was in a bad humour, and had kept her

room, owing to a headache, brought on by an interchange of opinion with her husband in their bedroom about yesterday's events.

Cicely stood silently over her work. The wet part of the ruff hung down in disorder over the side of the board, while the finished part lay in a curled heap beside her.

"Nella," she said, after a time, "when did they finish last night in Karsten's room?"

"Oh, rather early for them—at least when they finished here—somewhere about two."

No one spoke for some time.

"What can it be that makes them laugh so much?" began Cicely again. "You went up with the punch last night, didn't you?"

Nella did not answer. She seemed to be working herself into a state of excitement. Her indignation was always roused when any one began to talk about the men; all that was heard as she busily pressed her iron on her work was an occasional "H'm!"

"But you heard what they were talking about, Nella?"

"Ah, h'm! It is best to keep one's ears closed . . . . h'm!" replied Nella, as with some impatience she smoothed down the collar of a shirt. "I look at the tray and the glasses, and just put them on the table, without paying any attention to their talk; I am glad when I am well out of the room."

"Were they making fun of any one?" asked Cicely, cautiously.

"H'm—there are not many who get off scot-free from them; they are not even above making free with an old woman when your mother sends her up with the punch-bowl."

"How? What do you mean, Nella?"

"Oh, it doesn't much matter what I mean! But they ought to be ashamed of themselves for making fun of a decent body, and drinking her sweetheart's health. However, it doesn't signify to me. No one in this world has ever had anything to say against me before, so they might leave me alone now."

"And you got angry at that, Nella?" laughed Cicely.

"I should think any one would! Let those who like believe in them—many a one has been deceived! But downstairs in the sitting-room you may be sure they are everything that is polite and proper."

"Surely there is a difference in men, Nella; one may be this and another that."

"Well, I have always heard the same report of them—that they are all made of the same stuff! If the matter could be thoroughly sifted, then——"

She moistened her finger to test the heat of her iron, and continued her work in silence. Her face clearly betrayed the agitation which was stirring her

as in her old-fashioned way she expounded the wickedness of men in general.

"But it is hardly worth while for a young lady to trouble herself about the matter," she finished enigmatically.

"Soon, I shan't know *what* a young lady ought to trouble herself about," said Cicely shortly, working on at her ruff.

A ring was heard at the front door and some one went to answer it. A sudden idea flashed across Cicely's mind, that it might be Lieutenant Fasting.

But when the housemaid came into the room and really announced his name, the blood surged round Cicely's ears, and made her feel quite giddy. Pale with emotion she gathered the ruffs together with trembling haste.

"Dear me," exclaimed Nella, "is the lieutenant here again so soon? They ought to take a rest after their party, I think. I'm sure, his man can scarcely have had time to take the punch stains out of his coat."

This remark hurt Cicely. She took a hurried glance at herself in the small looking-glass over Nella's chest of drawers.

Her heart beat violently as she turned the handle of the door leading to the hall.

The bright, happy look with which he greeted her lost some of its warmth when he saw the cold, reserved manner in which she met him; as if she felt

the visit might possibly be intended for somebody else.

"I chose this time because I thought—" he began with some significance; then he glanced at her with an expression of painful doubt, which made him blush to the roots of his hair, and continued:—"because I thought that your brother had not gone out yet."

While he stammered out these words, that which he had been on the point of saying had apparently gone clean out of his head, his searching eyes noticed something cautious and cold in her manner which put him on his guard.

Did this peculiar, doubtful expression of her lips indicate a critical survey of him? There was, in any case, something wrong which made him feel insecure and exasperated.

And now, when he mentioned her brother, the answer seemed almost ironical:

"She had not seen Karsten to-day; most likely he was still in bed."

She did not seem to be herself, and her manner towards him had quite changed since yesterday; he could not be mistaken in that. Cicely stood for a moment breathing with difficulty. She forced herself to say that, if he would wait, she would ascertain at once about her brother.

In all this feeling of uncertainty, she had hoped for some word or other which would make her feel

secure. And yet it was hardly necessary; to look at him was to believe in him; all doubts vanished.

A sudden warmth pervaded her; for a moment she looked almost entreatingly at him. She felt tears rising in her eyes. The lieutenant's face trembled with emotion; he was all on fire with resentment; he spoke in an indifferent tone, bowing with great formality—"It's no use waiting, then; besides, I have some business to attend to in the dockyard."

She heard the bang of the front door as it shut behind him.

Cicely involuntarily made a movement as if to stop him; she felt on the verge of tears.

Jan was rushing up to his room before dinner to put away his books, when he encountered Martha on the stairs.

"Hush! mother has a headache."

"Has anybody been doing anything to you? You look so woe-begone."

Martha tried to escape him.

"Has Auntie been scolding you?"

She shook her head.

"Well then, what is it, Martha?"

She stood hesitatingly by the balustrade.

"Anything about me?" he asked suddenly, a suspicion arising in his mind. "Has your mother said

anything? Do you hear, Martha? You must tell me. Is there anything she——"

He was trying to find a way of expressing himself. In the meantime his eyes both met and avoided hers; he was trying to fathom her.

"——does not like . . . , perhaps that you are so much with me?" The words came with difficulty.

"No, she hasn't said anything about that, not a word; but you see, Jan," she began hastily, and the expression of her face became troubled, as if on account of what she was going to confide in him; "there is something the matter with Cicely and Fasting. Yes, for she received him in the hall this morning; he did not come in—and—she only turns away when I talk to her. Her eyes look so red, as if she has been crying. When I went into the sitting-room she stood quite dejectedly by the work-table. She must be terribly distressed about something. They must have been arguing again and quarrelled."

"Pooh! is that all? That is the very best proof that they will soon become engaged."

"Ah! in—deed?"

"Yes, of course! People always quarrel like that when they care for one another, and the more they fall out the sooner they make friends again."

"Do you think so, Jan?"

"I don't *think* so; I know it. One can always get along in all sorts of wind, as long as there is any wind, do you see. Generally speaking, it's only

people who don't care for one another who lounge about and never quarrel. Those who are most fond of one another quarrel till their hair flies out."

With one bound he was half-way up the stairs. Martha did not attempt to follow him. She stood with her head on one side looking thoughtfully before her.

There was something in what Jan had said which awakened an unpleasant feeling in her . . . . she and Jan were always friends, only played about and amused themselves . . . . "lounged about and never quarrelled," as he said. But a serious quarrel like that between Cicely and the lieutenant, which would cause her to cry her eyes out . . . . Martha felt her eyes were full of tears. She sat down in the sitting-room window all alone, and cried ; she hardly knew why.

VI.

As the March evenings lengthened, the balls and parties came to an end. The festivities were now reduced to small social gatherings here and there among the naval officers.

A break such as this after a long spell of winter dissipation is always attended by a general disorganisation of the ordinary systematical routine, developing into small afternoon "at homes," when odd visitors drop in who are not otherwise in the habit of calling.

Something of restlessness and inquietude appears on the surface of our social life, like crushed ice on a billowy sea. The sun shines brightly and dazzles our eyes, and the air seems astir with life and activity.

Karsten was unusually busy. He was shortly going to join one of the coasting-steamers and was taken up with all sorts of preparations for his outfit, and with continual visits to the Krogs and Wanckels.

The quiet fair-haired Minka Krog, with her graceful, slender figure and pretty eyes, who always kept Karsten amused with her fine sense of the ludicrous

possessed a certain fascination for him which he felt might become dangerous.

But now when he had only three or four short weeks left before joining his ship, he felt he might indulge himself by seeing and meeting her as often as possible—partly perhaps on her account, poor thing, for his departure would be no light matter to her. There were moments when he would sit up in his room and read English love ditties; at other times he would feel sick at heart, as if the world had no attraction for him.

To please his mother he would accompany her to the Wanckels to tea and make himself pleasant and entertaining. On these occasions he would feel a certain satisfaction in discovering by his mother's manner as they walked home, that he had turned the head of poor Wally.

But he generally had to pay a hurried visit afterwards to the Krogs to obtain a glimpse of Minka; and then he would let fall a hint that he had been bored at the Wanckels, or he would listen to Minka, as she innocently asked what dress Wally had worn that day, and if she had put on her expressionless smile with green, blue, or black?

Karsten could not bear feeling sentimental, but during these last days he could not help yielding a little to tenderness.

The life before him on board ship had many attractions for one who had been accustomed to

command a certain attention by his appearance and manners.

If he were going to fit himself out for his new position, which he might hold for several years, he would do so in a manner befitting a gentleman. He must have an outfit for good and bad weather, for sunshine and shower, rain and hailstorm; one suitable for the captain of a coasting-steamer, who is called upon to appear on deck, in the saloon, or to attend to passengers from all parts of the world, people of all grades of society.

To-day his dressing-case, which he had ordered from England, had arrived. It was now standing on the table, filling the room with an odour of Russian leather. The cut-glass jars and silver-mounted bottles, the various ivory-handled brushes and toilet objects were exposed to view, embedded in velvet.

Mrs. Witt was highly delighted with it, and thought it was just the very thing for a gentleman—for her Karsten.

Cicely regarded this collection of manly requisites with a wondering look of curiosity, while Martha longed to hear what Jan would say.

"What—what on earth is all this?" thundered the Commodore, as he entered the room.

"Karsten's dressing-case, father!" replied his two daughters simultaneously.

"From England," added Karsten, drily.

The Commodore stood looking at it for a moment in silence.

"Faugh!" he grunted, and left the room.

"Is it indiscreet to ask how much my fine gentleman paid for this—barber's shop?" he asked, turning round at the door.

"Seventeen pounds," answered Karsten in a jaunty manner, burning with vexation.

"Seventeen . . . . what? well—eh? — and not paid for, of course! Do you think this is right, Julia? In my time one wouldn't have been thought much of amongst one's mates with such tomfoolery as that! But of course——"

These last words were uttered in a voice which sounded like the blast of a trumpet, as the Commodore vanished through the door.

"Really, mother," said Karsten quietly, trying to control himself; "I think it's high time to get away from such degrading treatment; I might be a child; I can't stand it any longer. Such brutality! . . . He is nothing but an old boatswain, he is! He knows nothing of refinement, nor of the necessities of a civilised being. He hasn't an idea of what is called comfort now-a-days."

He threw himself angrily into the rocking-chair.

"The time is over when one walked about those wooden tubs with the articles of war in one pocket and the rattan in the other, domineering over people; when one only shaved on a Sunday and a

Wednesday and went the rest of the week with bristles all over one's face. Now when one can go from place to place by steamer, with properly trained people under one, one must conduct oneself like a gentleman, and adopt the habits of a gentleman! Just suppose for a moment," he went on, rocking backwards and forwards in his chair, his thumb stuck in the armhole of his waistcoat,—"that I had to give up my cabin to some notable passenger, a thing which might happen any day; they travel incognito a good deal now, both statesmen and princes . . . ."

"Yes, of course, Karsten," exclaimed Mrs. Witt; "I hadn't thought of that! It is only right that you should have a proper outfit. Witt, Witt!" she shouted hurrying towards the door.

"Never mind, mother," said Karsten, pulling her back, "he can't understand anything of that sort! Take my dressing-case up to my room, Martha, but be careful. Put it on my chest of drawers."

Since the morning when Cicely had parted with Fasting in the hall, she had looked forward with feverish suspense to each of the forthcoming social gatherings where she might expect to meet him; she wondered what would happen, how she would meet him, and what she should say to make it appear that nothing had happened between them. A lady must give the tone to her surroundings, her mother and Karsten had said.

To dance with him, to answer in a few words now and then, to look at him—all this would come quite naturally and easily. At times she felt so secure; she was so sure that he cared for her.

But then again all the old suspicions would crop up, which caused her much uneasiness, and tore her illusions to pieces.

Her mind wandered back again to all the mysterious conversations she had heard, and she pondered and pondered till she came back to the point from which she had started. She pictured to herself how he would approach her, what he would say and what she should answer. In what dress would he like her best?

When she entered the ball-room, trembling and pale, he was not there—he did not come, not the first time when she wore her plain white dress and her pearls, nor the next when she wore her blue dress with the ears of corn in her hair. The room had seemed suddenly empty. And she had been obliged to dance and make herself agreeable, and talk with those people whose compliments she cared for so little—how long the evening had seemed to her!

There was no end to the praise Karsten bestowed on her: he was greatly satisfied with her conduct and boasted of it the following day.

But Martha never got a word out of Cicely when she came home and stood before the looking-glass. She took out her hair-pins one by one and placed them

carefully in the small glass bowl on the dressing-table ; and then tidied away her dress and jewellery, each in its respective place, to save herself the pain she would experience in touching them next day.

At the ball at the officers' club, the last of the season, she surpassed herself. She had made up her mind to defy him that night, and make a great success because he had neglected her! She knew he would be there this evening. He belonged to the committee and had been upstairs to call on her brother that morning.

As she entered the room on Karsten's arm, all eyes were turned towards her—the pallor of her face heightened the expression of her features. She noticed at once how Fasting was looking at her, and how his eyes were following her from the moment she came in. She felt it would be impossible to look at him now, her heart beat fast one minute, and the next it seemed to stand still. He stood apparently waiting till they should pass him by.

"Good evening, Fasting!" said Karsten, "everything excellently arranged—very successful indeed."

"I would rather have your sister's opinion on that ; what do you say, Miss Witt?"

There was something in his way of addressing her which filled her with a foolish desire for revenge.

"Splendid! but why did you not take a hint from the ball given by the Lüders? All the floral decorations in the side rooms; don't you remember?"

He looked at her with surprise; surely she must have known he was not there!

"Ah, you weren't there, perhaps? But it was really beautiful!" she added, and with a friendly bow passed on.

She dared not think of what she had said. She felt as if something had gone wrong; the next moment some one engaged her for a dance; she was much sought after, the dancers whirled round, and the room became alive with conversation.

She came across Lieutenant Fasting once or twice in the middle of the room, busily attending to his duties as a member of the committee; and she caught him in the act of following her with his eyes while she danced. The ninth dance, the Vienna Waltz, she had kept for him all the time. As she passed him she tried to find an opportunity of bowing to him, and she saw how the expression of his face changed.

But the Vienna Waltz also passed by!

And yet there seemed to be some invisible thread holding them together. She felt he was watching her movements and the way in which she met and conversed with people.

In the cotillon his place was nearly opposite to her: she encountered his admiring glance as she

danced past him. After all, she felt as if she alone had any power over him.

It was not unintentionally that she shortly afterwards stood opposite him conversing with Lieutenant Devold in her liveliest manner. Fasting had once remarked on the speaking expression of her mouth when she smiled. One or two fugitive glances confirmed her suspicions; she did not escape his attention for a moment, and she almost trembled with joy at the thought that she so fully occupied his mind.

She felt that it depended upon her to overcome the slight breach between them.

How it happened or how she summoned sufficient courage she knew not; the whole thing occurred on the spur of the moment. In passing over to him as her *vis-à-vis* she whispered:

"Have you quite made up your mind not to dance with me, Lieutenant Fasting?"

He looked surprised, and it was a few minutes before he answered with a struggle:

"When one dances so awkwardly as I, one must not ask the queen of the ball to dance with one; and besides, being a member of the committee too," he added jokingly.

"You do not mean what you say, Lieutenant Fasting!"

"Do *you* always mean what you say?" asked he carelessly, waltzing round with her.

The "yes" she gave him in answer as she was whirled round in the dance, his arm tightly clasping her waist, came from the bottom of her heart—of that she felt sure.

He smiled in a strange way: "Of course, of course—I believe it too—on every occasion, a young lady has so many sincere convictions," he continued after a pause, pressing her hand firmly as they danced on.

In her blind transport of joy she saw nothing but the glare of lights over his shoulder.

"Such a slippery floor!" said he in excuse, as he renewed his hold upon her waist.

For the third time she noticed that when they passed her seat, he hesitated in relinquishing her; then the same moment as she was looking up at him, he said sarcastically:

"I am afraid I have detained you too long, Miss Witt; but what man would not prolong the moment in which he feels he has his happiness in his grasp?"

— — — — — — —

Fasting could not help it. Each time he had seen her, if only when passing her in the street, his heart beat, and he felt himself irresistibly attracted by her.

Never, however, had he seen Cicely Witt look so handsome as to-night.

His arm seemed still to retain the young elastic

figure: he saw again her rich chestnut hair and prettily curved neck so close to him. He had tried to fathom the expression of her face. It was so sincere, so full of all she had felt at the moment—he could have staked his life there was no deceit in her. Yet later on, when he saw her turning the heads of other admirers, did he feel a doubt?

She had not remembered whether or no he had been to the ball at the Lüder's. Oh what nonsense!

That she was dangerously fascinating he knew by the fevered state of his brain.

Several hours of the night passed; the grey morning dawned, and still he sat in his room smoking cigar after cigar. He could not remember how he had finished his last one; he was still unable to quiet and arrange his thoughts and make up his mind about the future.

"When a sensible man intends to marry and settle down in life, what is it he looks for?

"Perhaps for a woman who fascinates him and plays the coquette; who is interesting and incomprehensible, and who to-morrow may deceive one, more cleverly than the greatest scoundrel. To be totally ruined, turned out of house and home, and condemned to hard labour would be nothing compared with the horror of finding that one had a devil on one's back, which one would have to put up with till one dropped dead! It would make one so wicked at

heart, that the only alternative would be to strangle oneself and her, and clear out of the world.

"No, such a so-called infatuating woman, whom one could never fathom, would be too slippery a foundation to build a future upon."

He stood and somewhat impatiently began winding up his watch, the chain of which he had twisted round his hand; he continued winding in such an absent manner, that the spring snapped. It whirled round with a rush and then stopped; without troubling himself any more about it, he placed it on the table and went on thinking.

"One of the average sort, my dear fellow, every day, homely and modest—not exactly divine, but one that is steady-going and sure; she must be picked without prejudice or too nice criticism, as one would choose milch cows."

He seemed to find comfort in this last forcible simile, and pulling down the blinds to shut out the bright morning light, he went to bed with a clear and settled mind.

VII.

MRS. WITT'S whole mind and attention were for the moment absorbed with Karsten, who was to enter upon his new duties the following week.

The Commodore preferred to keep out of the way; he did not look upon his son's resolution in such a rosy light as did his wife. He felt he must be careful lest he should commit himself, so he resorted to silence and made no comments. He could not help noticing, however, that his presence in the sitting-room, at this time all alive with bustle and preparations for Karsten's departure, did not enliven the spirits of his family.

The Commodore was standing before the clock from which he seemed to expect the exactness of a chronometer.

"Jan is going to stop here another couple of months after passing his examination, Julia. I have told him I quite agree with him that he should go on long voyages from the first. He will have to wait for Müller & Co.'s American trader."

"Indeed—I had hoped there was an end to his stay here! You haven't heard me grumble at all,

Witt, the whole winter, although I was so much against it from the first. This young sailor is not fit for our society; and now we are to put up with him for another two months."

She rose impatiently from her seat. She was busy making some egg-flip, the beating of which could be heard in the dining-room where Cicely and Martha were busily engaged. Karsten was expected home every moment, and he generally had a couple of friends with him.

"Jan can get away earlier if he likes," Mrs. Witt began again. "Karsten has got him an offer as second mate on Wanckel's 'Sjofna.' Such a fellow must not give himself airs and think he can pick and choose as he pleases!"

"Oh nonsense, Julia! the boy has got courage, and a liking for work. As long as he has no capital to put into a ship, he will never be anything but a common skipper, whom the owner can turn away at any moment;—he doesn't prefer, like others, to mix himself up in petty trading backwards and forwards round the front door with no future before him!"

The last sentence was uttered in a rather excited tone.

"My opinion is, the young gentleman only likes to loiter about ashore and do nothing as long as possible; throwing dust in the eyes of his simple-minded old uncle by talking of long voyages, and all sorts of grand things."

The Commodore winced visibly. He had long and sorely felt that nature was demanding its due, and that the infirmity of age was creeping upon him. What he did not perceive at one period revealed itself all the more cruelly at a later one. The difference which years made in him pained him greatly.

This was his weak point, where he was, so to speak, at the mercy of his wife. She could not resist the temptation of resorting to this weapon, which, when occasion demanded, helped her to have the last word.

She noticed the effect, and regretted her words as soon as they had passed her lips. She now racked her brain to think of some way of reconciling him, and said with a smile which reminded him of her younger days:

"You are so warm-hearted and headstrong, Witt, you make me lose my temper sometimes. I cannot stand this quarrelling! I ought to know by this time that it is as well to give in first as last; for, before I ever saw you, I heard that Lieutenant Witt was a man who would have his own way. If you don't mind waiting, I will fetch a glass and give you some egg-flip."

Although the Commodore became more and more aware by bitter experience that his will had too often to give way before that of his impatient and capricious wife, it still gave a certain enlivening and

combative piquancy to the relationship between himself and her. Consequently there were frequent and long domestic storms ; and it could not be said that in his later years he was enjoying a pleasure cruise on the squally seas of married life.

When Mrs. Witt came into the room about ten minutes later, he sat, fatigued with the exertion of his morning round of the dockyard, asleep on the sofa.

She placed the egg-flip on the table. His flabby, furrowed face, with the large, sharp nose and snoring, half-closed mouth, had sunk on his bosom and was buried in the breast of his open waistcoat ; while one arm hung over the back of the sofa.

She stood and looked at him for a moment, then took the sofa pillow and put it carefully behind his head.

No more pleasant little gatherings, no more card parties or picnics !

Mrs. Witt felt inclined to make some festivity out of the occasion, as a counterbalance to the feeling of sadness which took possession of her every time she thought how empty the house would appear when Karsten had gone.

She took unusual interest in the housekeeping duties at this time ; in the making of special dishes which had to be prepared for the table ; as Karsten was always bringing some one home with him these

last few days before his departure. She directed and admonished Nella whose business it was to deliver his linen washed and ironed in the most finished style. This afternoon she was appeasing her restless desire for activity by embroidering a pair of elegant slippers for him.

As she sat in mournful dignity in her easy chair, now and then heaving a deep sigh, she might have reminded one of a lady of the olden times embroidering the funeral vestments of one she loved, had it not been that the tableau was continually disturbed by an irritable derangement of the curls on her forehead with the knitting-needles.

For the moment she was in want of a confidant with whom she could talk about Karsten, and conjecture whom he was likely to bring home this evening.

But it was intolerable! There was that eternal Jan sitting listening to every word she said, with his critical black eyes wide open, making it impossible to say a word in one's own sitting-room. This fellow prevented all confidential intercourse among the members of the family.

"Martha, you really have something else to do than waste your time and disturb Jan. I am so tired of seeing that ball of worsted continually dancing between you. Put away the skein-winder and go and find something to do."

Martha's face turned crimson; she felt her mother's

taunts at Jan very sorely, and was in a continual state of fear lest he should notice them.

"I am really so anxious about Jan's examination," exclaimed Mrs. Witt as he went out. "I do not see how he can possibly pass. If time ever was of any value to him, it ought to be so now, before he goes up; but I suppose he argues to himself that it will be more comfortable and pleasant to honour us with his presence next winter as well."

"He has been at his lessons since four o'clock this morning," said Martha, with difficulty suppressing her tears.

It excited her greatly this afternoon to see that Jan was really going to carry into practice his plan for a long sea-voyage; she felt more than usually sensitive. He would be away so many years at one stretch!

She sat mute and troubled, brooding over all this; her tears very near the surface; had he gone up to his room?

"Jan, Jan, are you there?" she said, knocking at his door and putting in her head.

He had loosened his neckerchief and sat with his black head bent over his book.

"You mustn't disturb me; you heard," he said sharply.

"Pooh! all that was meant for me. Mother always wants me to be poring over my lessons or practising at the piano."

"Oh, no; I understand what she means. I am one too many here and must take myself off; it's no use mincing matters; but, I say, I really believe you take it to heart, Martha?"

"What an idea!" Martha felt how difficult it was to-day to keep from crying. "Gracious, what a mess your room is in, Jan!" she exclaimed, changing the subject. The whole contents of his sailor's chest were turned out all over the floor.

She came right into the room, leaving the door open.

"Oh, I do just what I like up here; I like myself best when I am grinding away; then I have no time to remember anything else."

Martha turned back the cover of one of the books on the table; she always thought he wrote his name so boldly—"Jan Börresen."

As she stood despondently by the table in her pretty dress, wondering how she should express all that was in her heart, he glanced dejectedly across at her, his look resting on her face.

"I suppose you are glad now, Jan, because you are going to carry out your plans?"

"Glad?" he drawled; "glad? Yes, indeed, as the sailor said when he got off with his life on condition he should swim across the Kattegat. The sooner one jumps into it the better. Bah!" he said rising suddenly to his feet; "how I wish I could go straight off the day after the examination."

Martha stood thumbing the corners of the book.

"And I—I thought it would be so—so nice for you to be here two months longer. But if you are so tired of us, and cannot think of anything else but of getting away, it is perhaps best after all. Yes, you had better go! You had better go!" said she vehemently. "Why should you not do what you wish? You had better pack up your things and go at once, since you are so tired of us, and can't get far enough away. Nella will be sure to get your things washed in time."

The last remark nearly overwhelmed her, and it was with a stifled sob that she added:

"I wish you were gone!"

"You are mightily mistaken about what I mean, Martha. Can you not understand that—that——"

He looked at her, his face changing with suppressed emotion.

"No, you don't understand anything I see!" he continued, heaving a deep sigh, while he impatiently threw his things back into the chest.

"You could have come here often, perhaps every fortnight, like Karsten, if you were not going these long voyages," she remarked, somewhat more calmly.

"Thank you; once a year, when the steamers lay up at Christmas, to see you in all your finery, playing the fine lady among the grand folks! What fun that would be for me! I should feel like a lobster

in boiling water. Once a year!" The last three words came out with such unnatural merriment that Martha could only stand and look at him. "No, I tell you, Martha," he continued, stretching himself, "I can go to the North Pole, and I can go to Japan, but come back again, no, that I shall only do once!"

Martha felt her face get redder and redder; she could not look up at him, but the gleam in his dark face seemed to shine before her as she sat balancing herself on the edge of the low table, carelessly playing with his blue cap which lay amongst the books.

"When you come home you will see."

"Yes," he replied, bitterly; "then I shall see many strange things."

"You must write often, Jan—to Cicely and me, when you write to father. We'll write to you on foreign paper, and tell you all about everything; but how often do you think we can get letters?"

Jan was looking exceedingly thoughtful; he felt a burning desire to explain himself. But of what use would it be? She could not be responsible for what she might think in six, seven, eight, or nine years, if he came home then as a man with a position in the world and some capital in his pocket. To bind her by a promise which perhaps she would bitterly regret in years to come!

He stood looking at her as she sat there swinging one leg backwards and forwards. Her supple

figure charmed and fascinated him; full of the boisterous health of youth, it seemed loth to clothe itself in the stiff garb of the lady of society. Her easy, confidential manner, the unconscious wondering look in those eyes which shone with such an inexpressible hint that he was as necessary to her as the air she breathed;—all this tempted him more than ever to speak at once.

With a smile of disguised despair he flung a woollen jersey into the chest.

"If you really will write to me now and then—it will be the greatest joy you can give me in the world, Martha; only mind the letters come often. Not longer ones than you really care to write. I don't want any of these cousinly letters, sent for charity's sake; where the paper is so carefully divided to show there is a little from each of the family. No, thanks; not for me!"

"Who's there?" he asked suddenly. Somebody was coming up the stairs and he felt it would not be quite the thing if any one came in and found Martha talking to him.

"Pooh! it's only Cicely," said Martha, who commanded a full view of the passage. "I can guess what's the matter. I know why she has gone into mother's bedroom in such a hurry. She only wants to see if Fasting is coming home with Karsten this evening. From the window in there we can see

right round the corner by the Navigation School. Just imagine, they haven't made it up yet! I really think it's a great shame the way he tortures her. I assure you, she suffers agonies—watching there every evening till Karsten comes home. . . . If Fasting only knew," went on Martha, apparently reflecting whether she ought or ought not to find a way of telling him of it. "If I were she—and we became good friends again—oh, wouldn't I pull his hair. The way he torments her does make me so wild! Half past seven already," she said, looking at the little alarum clock on the wall by the washstand—"we are going to have supper directly, I really believe he's not coming this evening, either."

"Oh, there's nothing to hinder them; they have only to go and make it up, whenever they like!"

Martha looked at him disdainfully; offended at his want of feeling. But he looked up at the ceiling, and added with a conviction that quite carried her away:

"Great heavens, if it were only a question of making friends."

Why she felt so happy that evening Martha could not exactly tell.

But what gave her most satisfaction was to think that Jan and she had really quarrelled like Cicely and Fasting. She had in her own mind often won-

dered why Jan never treated her as Fasting treated Cicely; he seemed only to be her friend and companion.

After the events of this evening, however, her mind was relieved of a real cause for concern which had been troubling her.

VIII.

THE spring was far advanced and the change of the season became more marked. Martha was counting, with a heavy heart, the last remaining days before Jan would sail for America. Out in the harbour lay the corvette ready to put to sea, in which Fasting, Bull, and Storm were to sail.

With Easter, too, began a busier time of year for the Commodore; everything had to be in readiness for official receptions and visits, not to speak of the possible arrival of foreign men-of-war in the port.

The Witts' house was so to speak turned upside down from top to bottom. Workmen from the dockyard were busy painting and whitewashing; scrubbing and polishing were going on all over the house.

Mrs. Witt was to be seen at one moment in the garden busily giving her orders to the workmen; at another ferreting about in the kitchen, where the stove was being blackened, and the brass and copper kettles polished by the servant girl; while both her daughters were at work among the flower-beds in the

garden, their shoes clogged with mud and their hands covered with the damp soil.

Now and then Mrs. Witt would pay a visit to the King's room, where the charwomen were scouring the long planks with especial care.

This room was so called in remembrance of a visit from a Danish king, who, during his stay in Norway, had made it his quarters for the night; and whose portrait with a suitable inscription hung upon the wall. A smell of apples and other winter fruit which had been stored there still pervaded the room, the roof of which was decorated with ornaments and figures belonging to a more luxurious age. Mrs. Witt's step across the floor assumed an unconscious air of self-importance.

Her "round" generally finished with Nella. It was Nella's business to see to the windows and curtains, and her little figure was generally discovered buried among them on the top of a ladder, lifting a cornice pole above her head.

Cicely, suffering from a general feeling of nervousness, took her part as well in the household cleaning.

Anxious suspense and trembling expectation had had their effect upon her strong temperament. All this self-analysis, this atmosphere of the inexplicable which filled the air, had filled her with a confused idea that it was a dangerous thing to be a young girl.

She felt an increasing certainty that the sense of disappointment with which her meetings with Fasting left her had its origin in her own artificial behaviour towards him.

There was always something or other to feel annoyed at afterwards; the relationship between them was so different and unnatural.

When he had come up to her so straightforwardly at the Fox's, she had drawn herself into her shell, and almost cut short his advances. Laura Fox and Catherine Meyer, who were standing close to her, watched her and noticed her behaviour to him. And when, to remedy this, she had forced herself to become chatty and talkative, his eyes told her that he could see she was behaving unnaturally.

"Friendly and quiet!" her mother had said. Yes, that was the very reason she had got herself into all this trouble.

To-day she was standing on the table in the summer-house with a pot of paint at her feet, painting the old grey trellis-work green.

She stretched as far as she could reach; she had to take the brush full of paint and daub it plentifully up between the trellis-work, and avoid, as best she could, getting splashed herself.

"Very hard work that, Miss Witt," said a merry voice from behind her.

She trembled all over; she knew the voice well, but at the same time a fear came over her. Was it

proper to stand up there, or should she jump down?

There was a touch of pride in her which stirred her to revolt; she could not induce herself to make this jump with an appropriate laughing excuse, so she remained standing, and said with a smile:

"I must finish the roof if I don't want to expose myself to a second splashing on another occasion."

"Can you reach up there, Miss Witt? . . . . Shall I fetch you something higher to stand upon—a footstool?"

"No, thanks," she answered, somewhat shortly.

"H'm, shall I be at all in the way?"

"Not at all." Here Cicely turned round, and smiled in her most fascinating manner.

"Then you have no objection to my remaining here talking to you till the Commissioners come out of the house. We are inspecting the houses round the dockyard; Captain Fox goes about bowing and saying: 'Everything in order!' I am only the secretary. But where did you get all this paraphernalia of paint from?"

"From the men outside who are painting the railings. The sight of the paint-pots tempted me."

"It is quite a pleasure to see a young lady doing something—well, something natural—something she can do in a natural manner."

"Do you really think so?" Her voice sounded

almost ironical, as she thrust the paint-brush into a corner of the roof.

"Yes, Miss Witt, I assure you I think so—for the simple reason that a natural occupation to my mind is the sign of a natural character, and——" his eyes followed all her movements, and she was not unconscious of this—indeed, it rather pleased her than otherwise. "It is not only the exterior. The mind, you know, can fascinate one in the most peculiar way; and yet the cold, deceitful ways of a coquette may often lurk beneath, Miss Witt!"

"Lieutenant Fasting, what do you consider me?" exclaimed Cicely, letting her hand with the paint-brush fall at her side.

He looked up at her as if he longed to take her in his arms and lift her down.

"What do I consider you? . . . . I consider you are what you are, the alluring child of the moment . . . . but in the space of two minutes you can be two people. You can't help that," he said almost sadly.

"Thanks for your good opinion of me, Lieutenant Fasting," she said coldly.

"You are not offended with me, Miss Witt?"

"I? No; how can you think so? You saw how attentively I listened to your lecture. . . . . Come, help me to take the paint-pot and put it outside—then you'll be doing something useful."

She handed it to him and jumped down.

"Tell me, have I vexed you?" he asked with some warmth.

"Me? Why should you think so; a lady can never take offence, they say. Being two people seems much the same as being nobody at all. What can it matter . . . . a woman is scarcely an individual after all."

"Cicely, have I given you any pain?" he whispered earnestly. "If so, I would give anything not to have spoken! But it is all because—because—you alone in all the world can bring me to forget myself—you alone!"

The Commissioners appeared at the garden gate, deep in a conversation with the Commodore.

Mrs. Witt thought the gentlemen ought to fortify themselves with a glass of port wine, and the party disappeared into the house—not, however, before Captain Fox, as gallant as he was bandy-legged and bald-headed, had asked permission to "feed his eyes," as he expressed it. He seized Cicely by both wrists swung out her arms and stared into her eyes, his plump red face full of devotion.

"Everything in order, Miss Witt? Of course, of course!" he said, complimenting her rapturously.

— — — — — — —

Fasting's last words lingered in Cicely's ears. "You alone in all the world!"

They had come so suddenly, just when she had felt chilled to the bone.

She stood with the corner of her linen apron in her hand, there was a large green splash of paint and any number of little ones—and she stared with absent eyes at the imaginary spider's web into which she had been inveigled. She felt like a rescued fly.

A wasp buzzed in and out the trellis-work; it seemed to say: "You alone in all the world!"

Mrs. Witt was unusually busy this year during the week before Easter; her domestic arrangements were endless, for Karsten's birthday fell on the 20th of April, and the steamer, on which he was second in command, was due that day on its fortnightly route at eleven o'clock in the forenoon.

Usually the steamer lay about an hour or three quarters of an hour in the harbour, to allow Andrew the Commodore's servant to bring the washing on board, while the white steam poured from the funnel with a deafening noise. The passengers and their luggage were landed on the wharf in great haste, and the cargo lowered from the crane into the lighter, and so taken on board. On many occasions there was scarcely time to exchange greetings with Karsten from the ramparts, or the windows, or to speak with him hurriedly from a boat in which Jan would row his cousins alongside the steamer.

Mrs. Witt's motherly feelings, so often pent up, had this time found vent in an irresistible desire to

prepare a birthday fête for Karsten, and to have her son at home with her once more.

She pictured him to herself as he was swiftly rowed ashore in the gig belonging to the dockyard, as the fêted hero of the hour, whose health would be drunk by the assembled company in champagne around the bountifully laden table; how her own *rôle* would be one of silent, hidden tears—how Karsten with all his winning ways would reply to the toast, how she then would embrace him tenderly and heartily, not forgetting, however, the dignity which becomes a woman of the world; then how he would suddenly vanish again like a meteor. All this would not be wanting in effect; it would surround him, as it were, with a halo, and Wally Wanckel would, of course, be among the invited.

The whole should be made a splendid affair. It only remained to get the three quarters of an hour prolonged to an hour and a half, or possibly to two hours; one quarter to get ashore, another to return on board, and the remainder would be all theirs.

She had already pressed into her service Captain Fox and the other authorities whom she knew and got them to assist her in the matter.

She had induced her husband to give a hint of her wish to the captain of the steamer in a letter he was writing about some goods for the dockyard. The Commodore had expressed a hope that he might see his son at home for a short time on Thursday.

But her anxiety was not to be eased. Everything depended on whether there was much or little cargo to be discharged.

Under such circumstances it was rather risky to prepare a lunch with jellies and champagne, and to invite people.

Everything was ready; the gig's crew was waiting at the wharf ready to go on board, and Jan had been on the look-out on the top of the hill at the south entrance of the harbour ever since early morning, to give the signal as soon as he saw smoke on the horizon. After much opposition Martha had obtained her mother's permission to accompany Jan on this expedition. She would have plenty of time to return and change her dress; she always saw the steamers come in sight before any one else.

Jan was to sail next Saturday—the same day that the corvette was going to sea, and what would happen afterwards Martha dared not think.

Jan dragged her by the arm up the hill—then they suddenly began to race one another.

Martha soon got tired of this, however, and had to rest; then Jan stopped awhile and took her hand in his, until she suddenly became restless and hurried on:

"But, Jan, we must make haste; the steamer may be in sight."

And so they walked and ran, his arm round her waist, till they arrived at the red painted watch-

house on the top of the hill. The sun was already baking the walls of the hut.

The sea lay below them, bright and glittering in the sunlight; the crested waves were covered with white foam. There were many ships, little and big, smacks and pilot-boats, to be seen in all directions sailing before the fresh breeze;—but no trace of smoke from a steamer.

It was too early, perhaps; only half-past nine.

They sat down on the lee side of the watch-house, where there was a small bench, from which, by putting their heads round the corner, they could command a full view of the horizon.

Jan was playing with Martha's hand. To-day it seemed so natural to both of them to sit like this, hand in hand.

All at once an uneasy feeling came over him; he sprang up and began to walk about. "I must look for the steamer, Martha! It is windy here, I think you ought to go home now. You can say there is no sign of the steamer as yet . . . . and besides, you have to change your dress."

"Thanks! You are very kind; I might as well have stopped at home altogether."

"I did not ask you to come with me and catch cold," he continued in such an unpleasant tone, that Martha felt the tears rising to her eyes as she looked at him.

"Well, well, I didn't mean that exactly. But to stop here, perhaps for two hours, and get yourself chilled right through;—you should consider that, I think."

Martha's face was still troubled.

"Well, sit here on the seat a little while and I will walk up and down."

"Do you see anything, Jan?" she asked shortly afterwards, putting her head round the corner.

"No."

"Nor I either. Fancy, here are some crowberries already; just come and see."

They searched among the boulders along the edge of the hill, and found several more berries.

Presently Jan discovered Martha leaning against a large moss-covered rock, looking out over the sea.

"Are you crying, Martha?"

"No, certainly not," she replied, shaking her head.

"But you are; what is it—what is the matter with you? . . . . You ought to go home, Martha."

Martha's form shook with convulsive sobs; she was evidently struggling to suppress some violent emotion. All at once she burst into an ungovernable fit of sobbing, leaning heavily against the rock, and burying her face in her hands.

Jan attempted to speak to her, but she did not hear him; she only sobbed more and more.

Then he went behind her, and took her hands in his, and held them firmly, and tried to comfort her, while her whole frame shook with emotion. All at once she turned her glowing, tearful face to him, and said:

"I'm only thinking, Jan, if it were you I was looking for;—I shall never have any steamer to look for!" she cried, throwing her arms round his neck. "You will be gone then! Oh, Jan, Jan, don't go away, don't leave me! . . . ."

Mrs. Witt's party was a success in every way; the arrangements for Karsten's landing were well carried out. His speech after luncheon was well received. The jellies were excellent, and the guests enjoyed themselves thoroughly, more even than Mrs. Witt in her most hopeful moments had dared to expect.

While Karsten's health was being drunk, two hands slipped softly into each other, while their youthful owners drank in champagne to their young untold love.

Two other faces also shone with happiness, but of a different kind—that of thrilling expectation.

Fasting could not keep his eyes from Cicely; to-day everything distant and unnatural between them seemed to have vanished, and the few significant

words they exchanged had a meaning which neither of them could mistake.

Karsten had disappeared after having expressly declined all company down to the boat, while Mrs. Witt stood, portly and dignified, in the midst of the animated party, enjoying all the glory which her son had left behind him.

IX.

CICELY seemed to be full of a new life;—she went about the house with an impetuous elastic step humming to herself; her eyes beamed with happiness. She knew that in eight days Fasting would sail in the corvette which lay in the harbour, fully rigged and ready for the hoisting of the Blue Peter.

She had known it some considerable time, but now the feeling that something was going to happen seemed to make her more happy. There was something . . . . something—since the last meeting in the garden. She passed the time in a restless state of happiness.

He had duties to attend to daily on board, and every morning she watched him as he was rowed to and from the ship in the smart gig, sitting aft and steering.

She had promised to call on Tuesday morning and say good-bye to Laura Fox, who was going away for the summer. Cicely would have to be there early to see her off by the steamer. It was not altogether improbable that she would meet Lieu-

tenant Fasting down there. One of the gigs from the corvette lay by the wharf already waiting for him.

She was up and dressed before six o'clock; but she had been awake long before that hour, and had heard the watch-parade beating a tattoo as it passed through the dockyard gates.

It was a clear, bright spring morning, with a few light clouds overhead. She pulled aside the blind to let the sunshine into the room. A sunbeam fell on Martha's face and disturbed her. She awoke and made some incoherent remarks as Cicely went out at the door.

The morning was fresh and balmy, and Cicely enjoyed her walk. Down on the pond, by the church, the ducks were diving and quacking loudly. The hands of the church clock pointed to half-past six, so it was too early as yet to call for Laura.

She leant against the railing, and looked down into the water. The top rail was well worn and polished with the constant friction of the passers-by and townsfolk who liked to loiter about the pond before church time and stare at the ducks.

Cicely could think of nothing but the possibility of meeting Fasting; she did not trouble herself about what she should say or answer, but stood there full of anticipation, pressing her beating heart against the rail.

The clock struck seven before she was aware of the lateness of the hour; in a few minutes she was at the door of Laura's home.

The windows were open after the morning's work, and the packing of Laura's things had just been completed. There was still plenty of time; the steamer did not start till eight o'clock,—there was no need to hurry over breakfast.

"What a pretty blue dress you have on, Cicely! When did you buy it?" asked Laura, greeting her.

"Yes, indeed, I must say it fits you well," exclaimed Mrs. Fox, eyeing her from head to foot; "but it is a little coquettish, perhaps," she added with a slight twitch of the mouth, which she could not suppress. Then she continued more pleasantly: "You ought to take a lesson or two in style from her, Laura; one cannot wonder at Cicely's manners and style, when she has such an experienced woman of the world for a mother."

"Oh, shut the window, Jess!" she shouted to her son, whose one ambition it was to be a midshipman. He had swallowed his breakfast before Cicely arrived, in order to get to school early.

The two young girls chatted about their summer holidays all breakfast time, Mrs. Fox every now and then giving her daughter some warning or advice about the journey.

"We intend to arrange a lot of boating-parties,

ladies and gentlemen," broke in Jess, with much importance ; " we can have Bölling's big cutter as often as we like."

" I suppose young aspirants like you will be the cocks of the walk when the others are gone," said Laura, with sisterly impertinence.

" It will soon be half-past seven," suggested Mrs. Fox. " You must be off to school, Jess."

Jess, somewhat flushed, began to collect his books, which had fallen out of the strap on to the sofa where Cicely sat.

He took up his cap and said good-bye ; but shortly afterwards returned,—he had forgotten his English Grammar.

" Oh dear, oh dear, you do take your time, Jess. Wasn't it you who pretended to be in such a hurry ; you hadn't even time to help me to close my box," said his sister.

" He is sure to come back again as long as you are here, Cicely," Laura continued, when he had gone ; " just look there ; he is peeping in at the window."

Laura and Cicely wanted to start before the others, as they had much to say to each other. Mrs. Fox was to come on afterwards in the carriage with the luggage.

The streets were already beginning to fill with the usual stream of passengers going towards the wharf ; an old custom-house officer was seen hurrying along ; many young girls were congregating together, while

a number of lads ran to and fro shouting. On the wharf some naval officers were standing in conversation, at the sight of whom Laura started.

"To stand there on exhibition for Mr. Bull, and Fasting and Jerwel. No! Come let us go back; there will be no steamer for half an hour."

"But why in the world!"

"You have no idea what they find to say about us afterwards, Cicely! We come there only on their account. And when they see we have been in such a hurry to get down here, and have left mother behind, they are sure to draw their own conclusions."

"Oh, pshaw! what can they find to say? Is there anything wrong in our finding pleasure in stopping and talking to them, considering how well we know them."

"You don't know what they are Cicely. I only tell you that you may be careful. They talk so . . . . " Laura pouted with the pretty little mouth that was exactly like her mother's, except, perhaps, that the latter's had not improved with years.

Cicely looked at her and said—"About me?"

"Yes, but I have never liked to say anything about it before. But since no one else will do so—fancy, they say you are altogether—altogether gone crazy about Lieutenant Fasting!"

"Oh, never!" Cicely looked down in shame.

"It is not a thing to pooh-pooh. The whole town talks about it, so it wasn't really on my account that I wished not to go down to the wharf. No one has accused me of running after any of them."

Cicely's foot was scraping up the weeds which grew between the paving-stones.

"And would it be so very wrong if I wished to have him?" she ventured to say with some defiance, blushing to the roots of her hair.

"What do you say, Cicely? I think you are mad. You cannot mean——"

Cicely seemed unmoved, even a little forbearing.

"I tell you . . . . any one who wants to have—a man . . . ."

"But, my dear Laura, how can they get one another when they don't want to have one another?"

"Want to have?—want to have?—a young woman can, of course, love a man, but to show it . . . . to make up her mind she wants him! And then, suppose he does not want to have her, what a scandal there would be!"

"But at that rate they would never be able to get one another."

"But surely one does not make up one's mind till one is asked, Cicely!" said Laura, in a superior manner. "There are thoughts one doesn't allow oneself at all," she added with a feeling of her own worthiness, looking at Cicely with her penetrating blue eyes.

"Mustn't one allow oneself the thought that one is in love?"

"Well, but one doesn't make up one's mind so definitely either. Feelings are really not things one can lay hold of with one's hands. A young girl need not necessarily have committed herself in order to get talked about, but if gossiping tongues do begin to talk about her, her reputation will be assailed, that is sure enough."

"But, Laura, would *you*, for example, think like this if you knew there was nothing whatever in it all, and would you take any notice of what some old women in the town sit chattering about over their coffee? I would not trouble myself about it in any case."

"You have really such peculiar ideas, Cicely. I suppose it is because you have been away so long abroad at the boarding-school. One really does feel oneself outside the world here at home . . . . but one cannot raise oneself above everything; and don't you think men make fun of us among themselves?"

"But you must really tell me, Laura, what it is I say and do that makes them criticise me," said Cicely, rather out of temper.

"I only speak in a general way, of course," answered Laura, rather flurried. "Other people might have been talked of a good deal last winter, if they hadn't taken care not to expose themselves. You are so wonderfully naive, Cicely; you think you

can behave to gentlemen as you do to ladies. You ought, of course, to know they put quite a different construction upon what one says and does, and if they see a woman is taken with them, they think it fine fun. No, one must never let them know what impression they have made—indeed, it is quite an art to know how to maintain a suitable position towards them."

Little Laura Fox had become quite eloquent over all the mysterious dangers to which a young girl is exposed in society ; over the hollowness of men and proper womanly instinct.

They arrived on the wharf in good time, Cicely feeling unpleasantly chilled, her face motionless as a mask.

She walked past the officers, met Fasting's fervent infatuated gaze with a careless indifference, and greeted old Captain Meyer with special enthusiasm. He and his wife and children seemed to engross all her attention. Their son, a midshipman, was going off in the corvette.

Captain Fox and his wife arrived in their carriage and joined the group. Two other naval officers and their families, who were expecting some one by the steamer, also put in an appearance. The smoke from the steamer could be seen already.

"You must have been up early this morning, Miss Witt," began Lieutenant Fasting, as he approached her.

"How do you know that?"

Cicely glanced hastily around her. She had an awkward shy feeling of having the searching looks of the whole company—of all the town gossips—upon her.

"Oh, I had my spy-glasses out—spying, you understand," laughed he.

"Spy-glasses!" she heard somebody whispering behind her.

"In the summer I suppose you'll be promenading in the mornings on the ramparts; I shall always see you there when I think of you."

"On the ramparts in the broiling sun?"

Cicely here noticed that Laura Fox became rather restless and uneasy.

"The morning breeze is beautiful up there; when I was reading for my examination and felt knocked up, I often used to go there. But that was before you were here, Miss Witt! I prophesy you'll be taking a good many walks round that part."

"To sigh and repine and look out over the sea with old Torgersen, who limps about there on his wooden leg?" laughed Cicely, a little satirically; she saw the crowd around them begin to thin.

"I hear Captain Meyer's son is going out in the corvette," she went on, trying to drag somebody else into the conversation. "And you are going also, Lieutenant Fasting—isn't that so? When do you sail?" she asked, absently.

"That is a state secret, Miss Witt," said he, in a strange voice; "which one could only confide to those in whom one had absolute confidence; and confidences, you know, one must be on one's guard against in this world. You have heard, of course, but have forgotten again the next moment; that is the right of all fair ladies."

He became rather pale, and turned round to help Laura into the boat.

It seemed to Cicely that at the same moment he sank into the sea out of her sight, and was lost to her for ever.

Later on, as all were dispersing, she purposely went out of her way in order to pass him; she greeted him almost beseechingly.

And he understood it! Her heart leapt with joy. He returned her greeting, greatly moved and rather sadly.

X.

ABOUT two o'clock on the Saturday morning, Jan's sea-chest was carefully carried down the stairs in order that the Commodore and his wife should not be disturbed.

Jan had said good-bye the preceding evening, and with great emotion had thanked his benefactors for all their kindness. Mrs. Witt was obliged to admit she had never expected Jan's departure would leave such a vacancy in the household. There was so much sincerity in his manner; she was pleased to see how he appreciated all they had done for him.

Martha had steathily got up an hour earlier than had been arranged, in order, as she explained, to be sure that Nella should have the coffee ready in time.

And so Jan bade farewell to them all.

He had already got as far as the dockyard gate, when Martha suddenly ran after him; there was something she had forgotten to tell him, she exclaimed hurriedly.

As the heavy gate swung to, she stole tremblingly past Cicely up to her room with her secret.

She felt a longing need to make Cicely her con-

fidant; but when she considered what they would all say, her father and mother and Karsten—and perhaps Cicely too! She was only sixteen years old! They would laugh and call it childish nonsense—she could not bear their ridicule; for it would be a life-long attachment.

And then they would be angry—chiefly with Jan; mother had always so much to say about him—everything was wrong; his hair like shoemakers' pitch!—that hair which Martha thought of the finest she had ever seen.

She lay and wondered how he would fare on board his ship.

Later on in the morning Cicely stood by the open window in Karsten's room quiet and motionless.

The corvette was to sail to-day; on board they were still busy with preparations, drawing in their nettings and washing the decks. Pails were thrown overboard and hauled in again, while the dirty water rushed out through the scuppers.

The sails, which for the last few days had been hanging unfurled, were now closely reefed, and belayed along the topped and braced yards; and all the boats were hauled in from the booms.

Cicely stood rooted to the spot near the window. She saw her father on the rampart watching everything through his spy-glass. Gradually other officials from the dockyard appeared, the ships in the harbour

began to fill with spectators, and a great number of boats put off to get a nearer view.

At eight o'clock the flag was hoisted on the gaff, while the pennant waved from the mainmast.

Now and then Cicely could see the bright buttons of the officers' uniforms gleaming in the sunlight, and believed she recognised some of them as they paced the quarter-deck.

At this moment her whole attention became concentrated on one object—she saw Fasting.

Her breath came in short quick gasps, she was overcome with emotion, and stood there oblivious of everything that went on round her.

A passionate storm was raging within her, to which she dared not give vent; she felt she must throw herself on the floor and cry violently.

He had not come! . . . . In a fever of suspense she had waited for him the whole day, every day this week. And yesterday, when he must have known she was out at her singing-lesson, he had called to pay his farewell visit!

Surely ever since their last meeting it had been understood that they loved one another!

And now!—her eyes swam as in a mist.

The boatswain's shrill whistle was heard. The corvette was weighing anchor. Commands were given and sailors swarmed up the rigging, and along the yards, the gaffs, and the bowsprit; the bright white sails were unfurled.

The corvette, which lay against the wind, now swung round, and the sails filled.

A salute was fired from the ramparts, the smoke from the guns floated before Cicely's window like a veil—the fine man-of-war glided smoothly out of the harbour before a steady breeze.

In a short time Cicely could only see the topsails of the corvette behind the ridge of the island ; then one last white speck.

The day dragged slowly on from hour to hour till bed-time came. A gleam of the light summer night fell through the window across the toilet-table upon the door of the sisters' bedroom.

Two chairs, over the backs of which lay dresses, threw faint shadows upon the floor, while the two beds set against opposite walls were buried in semi-darkness.

Cicely lay with one arm hanging over the side of the bed, staring vacantly before her. Everything was so desolate and silent around her.

Her eyes fell upon the looking-glass. Draped in its white muslin, it seemed to assume the form of a bride in her veil. In a fit of depression she turned away. Presently she heard a moan, and lifting her head attentively from the pillow, she heard quiet, suppressed sobs.

"Why are you crying, Martha ?"

Dead silence followed.

"But you are crying !"

"No—I——"

"Well, why don't you tell me what is the matter?"

"Oh, I was only dreaming about something horrible."

"I don't believe it; can't I hear you crying under the clothes?"

Martha raised her tearful face.

"Well, you can imagine I feel sad now that Jan is gone."

"Yes, of course, that's true."

This was said in such a melancholy voice that Martha sat up in bed and looked at her sister, then jumped across and went to Cicely's bed.

"The house is so terribly empty and dull without him," complained Martha.

"Jan was so kind and good."

"Ye-s-s," said Martha, again on the verge of tears.

"But he will come back some time; there are worse things than that."

Martha looked attentively at her.

"You mean Lieutenant Fasting sailed in the corvette to-day?'

Cicely threw herself back on her pillow and sobbed out:

"He will never come back again . . . . never!"

"Of course he will come back; he is so very

much in love with you—and you are so pretty," said Martha, comforting her.

Cicely silently shook her head.

"He can never take his eyes off you. You don't know all that I have noticed. At Karsten's last party he did nothing else the whole time but watch whom you spoke to; both Jan and I saw that. I assure you, he only pretends to be busy talking to people when you are in the room. It would be quite an easy matter to take his coffee away from him before he has even tasted it; and he takes his hat off so nicely to people, doesn't he?" she went on, with much warmth. "Yesterday when I met him, he raised it in such a significant way, almost as if there was something he wished me to convey to you. Do you think it was so?"

"You see," said Cicely, quietly, "I happened to offend him down on the wharf, and since then he has not been here."

"Is that all? Why, Jan said it was one of the best signs of—well, you know—of love, when one really falls out. And you say that was the reason he didn't come? He can surely write to you from the corvette. . . . . Besides, he will be back here again in the autumn. Is that anything to be unhappy about?"

Cicely sat up and kissed her sister passionately.

"You see," said Martha, comforting her, and

stroking her burning cheeks, "he didn't care to call here and see, and meet you among all of us, while he felt so uncertain. . . . . It was all done intentionally; don't you understand that?"

Cicely's overstrained nerves seemed greatly calmed.

She lay back on the pillow while her sister went on talking. Martha was sure she had kindled a little trembling hope, and then she knew so much to tell about Fasting.

When at last she crept back to bed again, she felt wonderfully relieved and happy; she was in any case sure of her Jan!

She nestled down comfortably under the clothes; there was so much in the last few days to look back upon.

XI.

THE smoke on board the steamer had treated Mrs. Witt's white ostrich feather most cruelly. It was not fit to look at—otherwise she had made a most enjoyable trip in Karsten's steamer to the capital. . . . . The most enjoyable weather imaginable, quite calm, except for a fresh breeze caused by the speed of the steamer. She had been treated with the greatest regard and deference; had even been placed on the captain's right hand at the closely packed dinner-table.

On board she saw Karsten in his full glory—as a gentleman among gentlemen. He was indeed of distinguished manner and appearance; it had amused her greatly to see him with an English baronet who was travelling in Norway with his daughter. He had walked up and down the whole afternoon with the baronet, in the most cordial conversation; and with the daughter he conversed as freely and merrily as if he had been bred and born among people of their standing.

There was something so straightforward and noble about Karsten; she had noticed the young

lady was a little taken with him . . . . how particularly friendly she had been when she thanked him for the travelling map he had lent them; it couldn't have been quite an accident that she, and not her father, had brought it back.

Among the passengers were a Mrs. Sem, the County Governor's wife, and another lady bound for some seaside resort; in consequence, there had been quite a confidential little overhauling of certain family affairs, as they sat under the awning. The "Werner" affair at Fossum they had thoroughly sifted to the bottom; the scandal was in full swing.

The first thing Mrs. Witt had done in the metropolis was to order new trimmings for her bonnet. She had used her black velvet mantle and grey silk dress when visiting, although she found them very warm.

But the dentist had been shamefully exorbitant in his charges and most probably she would be obliged to go back again to him during the summer, which would, of course, be more agreeable now she could travel with Karsten.

It was really necessary now and then to shake the home dust from oneself, if one didn't want to be shelved altogether. This little outing had quite revived her! But Cicely had become paler and thinner during her absence.

She had certainly been far from well, and had dragged on through the summer wearily and list-

lessly, suffering from palpitations of the heart, noises in her ears, and headaches, with no energy to do anything.

"But then all young girls are troubled with such ailments more or less," said Clausen, the fat naval surgeon. "Not a thing exactly to rejoice over," he said to the Commodore as they walked out. "It always begins with gloves, and fans and finery! The peasants are not troubled with it. One thinks one can shut out nature, but the result is the pale-faced anæmia now so common amongst us, and then one resorts to medicines, although the thing that really is wanted is something which would put an end to the whole artificial system of living!"

He called, however, at the apothecary's, and graciously ordered two sorts of mixtures, and one box of pills.

Still Cicely continued pale and thin, and was on the verge of losing all her good looks.

Dr. Clausen next ordered change of air to brace the nervous system; and so it was settled she should try a sea trip.

Cicely sat wrapped in shawls and rugs on board Karsten's steamer, and was going to make a tour along the coast and back again.

Having come on board early that morning, she was now beginning to feel sleepy from the effects of the strong sea air.

Weary and disinclined to occupy herself with anything, she sat as in a dream watching the busy life around her. People came and went, gliding to and fro like shifting pictures in a magic lantern. Voices sounded now and again, as if in the distance, though the speakers were close by.

In a dull sort of way she noticed how Karsten in his genial fashion would answer and comfort the passengers with assurances regarding the weather. He would pace up and down, his hands behind him, every now and then giving a fastidious order with respect to some spot on the deck, which was kept as spick and span as that of a man-of-war, while it was quite an exception for him to enter into conversation with any one.

To Cicely he was all attention, but in reality he felt disappointed with her. He had expected his pretty sister to create a sensation, and to be more pleasant to the people he introduced to her. She sat there, he remarked chaffingly, looking like an autumn fly.

The thick black smoke rose in heavy clouds from the funnel, as the steamer cut its way through the long billows.

The whole afternoon Cicely had seen nothing but that streak of the sea which was visible between the gunwale and the white boat which hung above. The sea now became more and more turbulent, and assumed a leaden hue. It so absorbed her, that

she could not get away from it even by closing her eyes.

At the last stopping-place a number of passengers came on board; all went down to supper before the steamer reached the open sea.

The shifting rays of the setting sun poured in through the port-holes over the heads of the hungry passengers. Now and then glimpses were caught of small wooden houses, as the steamer passed through the narrow sound between the islands.

A general feeling of safety and comfort prevailed, and for a short time the conversation became quite animated; then as they neared the open sea a kind of restlessness crept over the passengers and many left the saloon.

The ship began to roll and heave, the glasses clicked, and the tables creaked with the vibration of the screw; while the hanging lamp swung to and fro.

Many of the ladies who had come on board had brought flowers with them, which they wished to place in water; Cicely could never have believed that flowers could become so objectionable!

The waiters cleared the tables amidst much rattling of plates and dishes. The vessel heaved more and more, rising and sinking in the rolling waves.

A commercial traveller with some taste for music, sat down at the piano and regaled the company with the latest waltz and "The last rose," which he played

in the most expressive and melancholy manner, the music swelling and dying away as the ship rose and fell. The nerves of the passengers became more or less affected as one after the other they rose and left the saloon.

The air on deck had tended to make Cicely sleepy. She longed to go down to her berth.

There were as yet only a few people in the ladies' cabin. A mother was busy giving her two children food from a basket. They had just upset a bottle of raspberry vinegar over which they had been quarrelling, and the stewardess had been obliged to come to their assistance, while a young woman in one of the lower berths on the opposite side was occupied in soothing a teething child to sleep.

All around and in the berths lay travelling-bags, straps, parasols, shawls, overshoes and boxes. Every hook was occupied with ladies' wraps and waterproofs piled one on the other, making it difficult even to open the door.

Cicely could not help thinking, as she stood there preparing for the night, what a mighty confusion there would be when all these various articles were required by their separate owners.

Once settled in her berth, Cicely felt much better. The stewardess was very attentive to the lieutenant's sister. The little round window beside her stood open, letting in the fresh sea breeze. It amused her

to lie listening to the prattle of the three children who were going to visit their grandfather.

One after another the occupants of the cabin entered. One lady demanded in a sharp voice why a strange bag had been placed on her bed; she sent for the steward's book to prove her right to the berth, and with the air of an experienced traveller spread her things about and took down, with a "beg pardon," which did not allow of a protest, other people's clothes from the hooks which she herself appropriated. She completed her night's toilet at her ease, monopolising the washstand and towels as if she were in her own house.

Presently an elderly lady followed by a younger one entered. They had evidently discovered that they were both bound for the same seaside resort, they were so engrossed with each other, and so busy talking, that they took no notice of their surroundings, which, however, little by little toned them down.

A corpulent, grey-haired lady in a silk mantle had great difficulty in squeezing through the half-open door. Panting for want of breath she divested herself of her hat.

"Hang it in the passage, Dinah," she cried, handing it through the door to the stewardess.

Soon the order was repeated in the case of the silk mantle. Then came her dress.

"Hang it in your room; I shan't forget you for

your trouble; and, oh, dip a towel in some water and hand it to me."

Having thus performed her night toilet through the door with Dinah's aid, she vanished with surprising rapidity into her berth, whence heavy snores shortly proceeded.

The stewardess lit the lamp and screwed up the port-holes. She made ready two extra beds on the sofas, taking off some hand-bags and boxes, and placing them with the others on the floor.

The ladies' cabin was soon full to overflowing, and Cicely could not help feeling some apprehension for the coming night, although the stewardess assured her that her berth, chosen by Lieutenant Witt himself, was the best that could be had.

Two ladies hit on the happy idea of relieving themselves of their flowers by placing them in the washstand jug. They were assuring each other of the improbability of their feeling sea-sick.

"Where am I to hang my watch?"

"Where are you going to put your purse?" whispered the other, as she bent over her friend. "Good gracious, how hot it is up there!" she added, nearly tumbling off the stool on which she stood. "I really think the ship rolls more and more."

Then began an interminable search for a bottle of eau de Cologne, which had been mislaid; while two other ladies, in a faint tone of misery, exchanged

mutual assurances of comfort about the weather. The reason the ship heaved so unpleasantly was no doubt because the sea was heavier on one side; both the captain and Lieutenant Witt had promised them good weather.

By the light of the lamp various figures were seen gliding into the cabin, uttering involuntary exclamations about the rolling of the ship, the narrow space and the impossibility of finding room for their clothes. At length, more or less resigned, they found their way to their berths.

A biggish boy was seen struggling at the door; he wanted to be with his father in the gentlemen's cabin.

The even rumbling of the engine and the rolling of the ship, had a soothing and calming effect upon Cicely.

Before falling asleep she remembered seeing a woman, in travelling costume, trying to place a number of jam-pots inside the door, which were rolling about in the passage outside.

Far on in the night she lay struggling in her sleep, as in a nightmare. In her dreamy state she could hear some one calling for the stewardess, a crying child being hushed and now and then the rattling whirl of the screw as it was lifted out of the water.

An oppressive odour aroused her thoroughly at last. The lamp had burnt out, leaving the room

intolerably hot and suffocating, while in the semi-darkness could be heard the groanings and other unpleasant accompaniments of sea-sickness.

"Only a little longer, and then we shall be in smooth water again," was heard from the furthermost berth, where a mother sat holding the brow of her feverish boy.

"Only a little longer, and then it will be all o-o-ver," was heard.

The boy began to howl; he wanted to go ashore at once.

A lady lay panting and moaning; she had become quite hysterical, and was suffering from spasms in the chest; she never expected to reach shore alive.

From the next berth a white arm held out a bottle of naphtha. "If—if only I could reach a piece of sugar from the pocket of my dress over there!"

The sultry, objectionable atmosphere was now filled with an overpowering odour of naphtha.

This was becoming unbearable. Shut up in a little room, packed together with all these women and children!

Surely the windows could be opened!

Impossible! They were screwed down fast on account of the high sea. Only one had been left half open, the screw of which didn't catch, and the stewardess was being continually requested to shut it.

But then the door!

Cicely sprang up; it seemed to her that she must get away altogether if she was to avoid being suffocated in the pestilent atmosphere.

Every one was grumbling and calling for the stewardess; it was like a scene in a cholera lazaretto. Cicely tried to get the poor woman with the child some water from the carafe, keeping the door partly open with her foot, and remonstrating indignantly with the stewardess.

"Surely the sick lady with the child could be taken into one of the gentlemen's disengaged cabins?"

"Impossible, Miss. Some gentlemen may come on board during the night; besides, in two or three hours we shall be in smooth water again, and then everything will be right," said the poor stewardess, at her wits' end.

"Let me hand you your things," said Cicely, helping a young lady who had been lying on the bench, and who seemed resolved to go up on deck.

Cicely was not able to do much; her head became dizzy, and the walls of the close, reeking room seemed to become damp with moisture.

She followed the young lady's example, dressed herself hurriedly, and saved herself by going out into the fresh air.

The deck was almost deserted, and looked dreary and lonesome in the darkness. Over the side of the

ship could be seen a white track of foam, and from the engine-room could be heard dull, thudding sounds, while the funnel gave forth to the night air a strange, hissing noise every time the steamer buried its bow in the billows.

Cicely distinguished the form of the young lady on the seat near the smoking-saloon ; she walked up to her, and sat down by her side.

Neither of them cared to enter into any conversation. Both felt the necessity of bracing their nerves, and after a single remark upon the horrid state of things down below, they remained silent for some time.

They had taken their seats on the lee side, and now and then the foam dashing against the side of the ship sent a slight shower over them.

"Shall we try and get into the smoking-cabin?" said Cicely, thinking the other was rather thinly clad.

"Oh, no ; it is so fresh out here!"

Cicely stretched part of her shawl over her.

"How far do you intend going?"

"I shall be home the day after to-morrow. I am going to some relations north of Bergen—for the sake of the pleasure trip at sea, before the holidays come to an end."

The words "pleasure-trip" were said with a peculiarly bitter accent.

"I have saved up for this trip for two years," she

added. "My name is Anna Gregersen, and I am a teacher in Stathelle."

"That seat in front of the berths was a dreadful place for you to sleep upon."

"It might have been much worse . . . . with womanly patience a good deal can be borne . . . . strange there should be several of the gentlemen's cabins vacant!"

"Lieutenant Witt, here on board, is my brother. You may be sure I shall explain everything to him to-morrow. I only wish it were morning. He shall not be left ignorant of the state of affairs," said Cicely, assuringly.

Miss Gregersen looked pitifully and imploringly at her.

"Whatever you do, pray do not tell him. I dare not allow it to get about that I have made any complaint on the steamer. If it came to be known at Stathelle I should be disgraced as a teacher. In my position it wouldn't do at all. So you must be kind enough to promise, Miss Witt, you will not mention my name. If you do, I shall be obliged to say I am particularly well pleased. But, of course, if you speak on your own account, it will be another matter. I don't see why one should be so feminine as to be silent when one is independent."

There was something of indignation and plaintiveness in her voice.

To all appearance, here was a nice, quiet person,

whom Cicely had scarcely noticed during the day-time, and yet that calm exterior could hide so much bitterness!

This came as a revelation to Cicely. So there was really a difference in people! Some never hesitated in speaking out, whatever might be the cost; while there were others who suffered in silence, who kept their troubles to themselves, and who got through the world by licking other people's hands when they would rather bite. . . . . It was something, then, to be a Witt, of good old family, as mother and Karsten were always saying.

"In Stathelle? . . . . You are a teacher in Stathelle?" asked Cicely, by way of carrying on the conversation. The name carried with it certain associations. "I suppose there is not much society in such a little place?"

"No; I only know five or six families there—the Lorentzens, the Jesdals, the Fastings——"

"Ah, yes; they live in Stathelle," interrupted Cicely. "I know their son, Lieutenant Fasting, well."

"Yes; he was at home with his parents for a short time in the spring, before he went on his cruise. I met him one evening—rather a peculiar man. The parents are quite in despair over his projects with these new lighthouses. His father is so sensible and prudent; he is quite shocked to see his son writing to the papers and quarrelling with

his superiors. The people in the place are disgusted that the son should endanger his own career, when the father, at great sacrifice, has done so much for him. . . . . You know how they talk and gossip in such small places."

"Yes." Cicely knew—oh, how she hated it! Fasting to give up all his ideas of providing his country with better lighthouses, out of regard for others!

The conversation came to a standstill.

Cicely's heart swelled and thrilled as she sat there in the night, and thought of Fasting's plans. He had spoken to her about them, too. . . . .

Far away over the gunwale gleamed, from time to time, a bright, clear light. It seemed to come to her as a greeting every time it flashed from the lighthouse tower, and she watched it intently until it disappeared from view.

Further on towards the horizon appeared a new red light. This, with its strange gleam, occupied her attention till a grey streak, far over the sea, announced the approaching dawn.

On the bridge she distinguished two figures—the pilot and the man at the wheel.

With a feeling of freedom and light-heartedness she fell asleep, her head against the ledge of the smoking-cabin.

The sun was high in the heavens when she woke to hear Karsten's voice.

"Really, Cicely, you must be mad to be sitting here!" So saying, he wrapped another shawl round her.

"Oh, I have slept so splendidly up here, Karsten!"

She bestirred herself a little, and looked round. The teacher was no longer there.

Now she recalled to her mind all she wanted to tell Karsten. Miss Gregersen had, no doubt, prudently retired to the cabin, in order not to mix herself up with any unpleasantness.

"I'll send you a cup of hot coffee, Cilia. You need it, poor girl! Fancy sitting here in the cold morning air! . . . . But really, one can't always be on the look-out to prevent one's sister from rushing up on deck in the middle of the night!" he said, irritably.

"It was dreadful down there!" explained Cicely.

"Indeed! You were in very good spirits just now."

"You ought to know how we suffered!"

"Oh, I can imagine. We had rather a heavy sea last night."

"Yes; you ought to have been down with us a short time."

"Preserve us! In the ladies' cabin?"

"I tell you it was intolerable!"

"The sea-sickness? You know we often have much worse weather than last night."

"Packed—or stowed, as you would say—with a lot of small children in a hot, stifling room, and no ventilation. So inexpressibly disgusting—enough to make one ill."

"Pooh! Sea-sickness is a general human suffering," he said, shrugging his shoulders; "it treats all alike."

"You won't get me to believe that any person, however hardy he may be, even yourself or the captain, could lie in such a pestilent room without being sick? . . . . But the shameful part of it is, that there should be vacant berths in other parts of the ship. Almost every gentleman gets a cabin for himself—they are not stowed together in one cabin as we are."

"H'm!" he grunted. "Surely you wouldn't wish the ladies to invade the gentlemen's quarters?"

"In cabins by themselves?"

"And a skirt here and a coat there on the hooks along the passage? Rather an indecorous *pêle-mêle.* You surely understand this has all been well considered; and if you are the first to break the rules—especially on board a large passenger steamer belonging to the Government—then we shall arrive at a state of things which cannot be permitted—the abolition of all good form," he mumbled.

"I tell you, Karsten, this is really execrable."

"Hush, Cicely!"

"I think no lady shou'd tolerate it."

"What do we do the whole day except lay ourselves out to think of the ladies' comfort?" he said, in excuse. "We quite spoil you all."

"Yes, that's just it. You are so polite, bringing chairs and shawls, taking us to table, and paying us every attention: then all of a sudden we are thrust into an over-filled, horrible den, too disgusting to think of!"

"Come, now, Cilia—don't excite yourself; you are too nervous, far too nervous. People are coming on deck, and you look quite cross. It's very unladylike to show your temper—an unfortunate inheritance from the Commodore. You will have to look after that a little, Cilia. Brace up your nerves, and take care not to excite yourself. . . . . And now," he added, good-humouredly, "the sea is calm, and we can have the windows open in the ladies' cabin. They are getting the place cleaned out; you can very well go to bed . . . . a little nap soothes one's temper," he said, and laughed. "I should not like to find you in such a scolding mood every morning. . . . . Ah, here comes the coffee! When you have had some you must go below, for they are beginning to scrub the deck."

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Cicely seemed to be inspired with new life since Fasting's name had been mentioned.

She had spoken her mind more freely than she would have dared at another time; and besides, she

had got quite angry. The contrast between all the gallantry she had met with on deck, and the treatment down below reminded her so much of her experience of life, the reality of which in her eyes had always compared with its superficial gallantry much as the ladies' cabin with the deck.

Karsten was quite surprised at the effect the sea air had upon her. She was anything but the apathetic, drowsy being of yesterday. As she sat there swaying her foot and holding her parasol over her shoulder, she looked every inch a perfect lady. She examined those to whom she spoke critically, in her own peculiar manner. Each was exposed to a certain fine irony ; she smartly cut short more than one complacent gentleman—and lady, too. Camp-stools were unconsciously moved nearer and nearer.

She took all hearts by storm.

Karsten listened to the quick repartees as he paced up and down past her, and thought her *rôle* suited her admirably. She was a splendid girl. By Jove ! a beauty with spirit and dash !

And he became proportionately attentive ; brought up shawls, placed his own splendid plaid under her feet, and came from time to time to ask how she was.

"A brother is not a bit better off than a cousin," he said, jokingly.

Cicely noticed it all with a certain inner satisfaction ; she felt she was a success. It was a paying affair, she thought, to be aggressive and critical.

She felt she interested people, and that here she had found her key—a "sesame," which would open the world to her.

She felt too that she had made the best use of her time on board to develop her critical judgment. She seemed to have become clear-sighted just when she most wished to see clearly.

XII.

GOSSIP seems to take upon itself the *rôle* of overseer and busybody in the affairs of *fiancés*. The number of the interested is surprising; some are delighted, others enraged; some concerned, others try to make mischief; they know so wonderfully well how things will turn out—how he has got a girl who will lead him by the nose, or how she has been caught in the meshes of a man who will only cause her bitterness and tears.

There was no exception to this in the case of Karsten's engagement to Wally Wanckel; remarks fell thick and fast, and were not wanting in severity. The matter was discussed and sifted, and created quite a sensation in the town. No one doubted Mrs. Witt's hand in it.

And his treatment of Minka Krog! She had fainted when she heard of the engagement.

It was said that Karsten had a short time before told her of his distress, and confided to her that he was enormously in debt.

He had come to this resolution one day at sea in a heavy October gale, as the waves washed over the

deck, the prospect of the enormous expense of a two years' life ashore in Trondhjem had had a good deal to do with it.

The longer he remained in the steamship trade—and he had now entered upon his second year—the deeper in debt did he become. There was no help for it; Minka must be thrown overboard. A man must look to his affairs and make his calculations.

The letter was written during the gale, up in the steersman's hut, and delivered to the postmaster on board with a humorous: "For heaven's sake! don't lose it; there's money in that letter."

Both he and the postmaster had a steaming glass of toddy the same evening when, after having weathered out the gale, they reached Kristiansund.

The way Karsten would behave as an engaged man, when he came home for the two months that the steamer had to lay up, was looked forward to with great curiosity. Last winter he had spent in Trondhjem.

Everything, however, passed off in the most natural manner; one visit after the other was paid to friends and acquaintances, and—although somewhat late—even to the Krogs, and it fortunately happened that Minka was out when they called.

On the whole people were bound to acknowledge that since Wally's engagement, and since she had got more into the hands of Mrs. Witt, she had

become more natural and less extravagant in her style of dressing.

Mrs. Witt had, no doubt, her own ideas upon the way in which she could influence Wally and make her a fit wife for Karsten. Such things could not be done on the spur of the moment by exhortations, but by the imperceptible influence of surroundings—she was quite sure of this, and she would never be conciliated if Wally so misunderstood her position as to wish to have the monopoly of Karsten.

Martha alone refused to be reconciled to this engagement. Her indignation with Karsten showed itself in every pore.

The worst moment she ever experienced was that in which she saw her mother kiss Mrs. Wanckel; it seemed as if they killed poor Minka between them.

Martha was no longer the overgrown hoydenish girl of former years; she had developed into a strong well-built young woman, with a brisk energetic appearance, and bright winsome eyes.

She went on from day to day keeping her secret to herself; living a life which was nourished with expectations and anxieties from quite another quarter than her own home.

It was she who treasured all Jan's letters; and when she stole up to her room and stood by the hour together reading them, it was because she could

decipher signs between the lines which escaped the eyes of the others.

This long concealment of her secret could not but leave its impression on her. She seemed to have a difficulty in falling in with the interests of others. It quite irritated her mother to find her so lamentably careless about everything which generally occupies the mind of young girls. It was found impossible to draw her attention to matters of dress, Martha was completely lacking in taste for that sort of thing; wanting in all necessary vanity.

Her thoughts at the present time were fully occupied. Jan had been promoted to the position of first mate on a large petroleum trader plying between America and Europe, with a prospect of the company appointing him captain in a couple of years. This news had at first made her happy beyond measure; she saw he was now trying to win a future for himself and her. But afterwards she dreamed of nothing but petroleum ships on fire!

One evening she sat wondering how much heat it would take to make the petroleum lamp explode; this caused her to question her father about the risk and dangers of the petroleum trade.

But *that* oil had been discovered after the Commodore had ceased trading. It was, of course, risky enough, but not worse than trading with nitric acid —or gunpowder.

"Gunpowder!—why, that could explode at any moment!" said Martha with a start.

"Oh, one has to be careful of course, and keep it well stored."

"But I suppose it's forbidden to use lights or smoke tobacco on board, father?"

"And to cook one's food also?" asked the Commodore laughing. "Oh no, they take it quite easy; you see, sailors are accustomed to having only a thin plank between themselves and the sea. They sleep at their best when they hear the water rippling close to their ears. But they keep the petroleum in iron tanks. I had a lot of nitro-glycerine on board once; that stuff doesn't stand either pressure or shock. It wasn't pleasant, you can imagine; but you see I was not blown to bits after all."

"So you came out of it all right?" she asked, absently.

"No, my child," said the Commodore, contradicting himself; "I was blown to pieces, and all that was left of me is what you see before you."

"Really, Martha," said her mother, "where are your thoughts? It will never do to be so absent-minded."

"I was thinking of something else, mother."

"That is to say—you've got your head full of Jan's letters," said her mother, much annoyed. "A big grown-up girl like you ought not to trouble her

head with sailors' affairs in that way. They might have amused you about the time when you were confirmed, but now you must really put aside these childish ways . . . one would think you were still playing with dolls."

The Commodore gave an impatient grunt or two and left the room.

"Of course your father and I are pleased that Jan gets on so well," explained Mrs. Witt; "we have helped him and done the best we could for him, and it gives us pleasure to see he is grateful. But his place and sphere will never be among us, you must understand, Martha."

"But mother! . . to talk of Jan in that way . . . because he is poor."

"I don't refer to poverty or riches at all; he may be much better off than we are. But there is a difference in the way he has been brought up. He will go to and fro between America and Europe with his petroleum tanks; what interests can we have in common with him, except perhaps to buy petroleum of him occasionally?"

"Oh, mother, mother! how can you talk so unkindly about him," cried Martha, indignantly. "You can't mean what you are saying."

"Indeed, little Martha! you are getting quite enthusiastic," said her mother, stroking her head. "No one has anything to say against Jan; but he has to battle with a rough life—and it must, of

course, leave its mark on him. He may write to us now and then for the sake of old times, but that sort of thing never goes on very long—and you know you are such a big, sensible girl now. I think you had better go up stairs for my old fur cloak and we will see if we cannot get some very nice pieces out of it to make cuffs and collar for you."

"It is really very fortunate," thought Mrs. Witt, as Martha stole out through the door sad and disconcerted, "we have the Atlantic between us and this Jan! Thank God, it is only his letters which enter this house."

Cicely was standing ready dressed to go out with Karsten. He wanted to buy some particularly fine handkerchiefs at Printz's and wished his sister to help him in choosing them.

Karsten perfectly understood when a lady was *comme il faut*, and he did not object to show off his pretty sister on this occasion, when he intended paying a call to make some final arrangements for a combined sledging and skating party to a neighbouring lake, which was to take place the following Saturday. How well the dark woollen dress fitted her; what a nice finish the bow of red ribbon on the white collar made, and the smart turned back cuffs at her wrists—so simple and effective!

The sledge party had been arranged by Lieutenants Jerwel and Mourier, the lions of the season; the

latter had just returned from service in the French navy.

The only thing to be settled now was the starting point—should it be from the Wanckels' or the Commodore's?

The Foxes, the Falkenbergs and the Meyers were all of one opinion; the start ought to take place from the Commodore's; the reason no doubt being that the Wanckel family, who had more money than position, would get too much social distinction if their house were the rendezvous—and besides, they did not care to be made use of to *fête* Lieutenant Witt's future parents-in-law.

Cicely was not a little disappointed when Mourier, whom they met out with Beck, expressed his regret at having unfortunately promised little Elise Falkenberg's mother that he would drive and look after her daughter on the excursion. But Beck was at her service, if she would allow him the honour.

"I ought to be grateful to you, Lieutenant Mourier—for I cannot say I have much confidence in your driving," remarked Cicely; but it cost her a pang, all the same to find that Lieutenant Mourier was going to drive the prettiest of the young girls! As a matter of fact, he ought to have offered her his services first.

Saturday was a clear and frosty winter's day. At three o'clock in the afternoon the sledges drove up

almost simultaneously in front of the Commodore's house.

Lieutenant Beck was an exceedingly pleasant cavalier. He was renowned for his clever head and sarcastic tongue, but Cicely was quite his match. They tried to excel each other, and repartees fell thick and fast. The conversation became so animated that they scarcely took count of distance till they unexpectedly came upon the lake lying before them amongst the trees.

They halted at the house of a mutual friend, where some steaming coffee awaited them. The heavy sledge wraps were dispensed with, and the skaters soon found their way to the ice.

Lieutenant Beck gallantly fastened on Cicely's skates, and helped her out on to the ice with some ostentation. From childhood Cicely had been used to skating, and could skim lightly and gracefully over the ice.

She forgot everything for the moment in one wild career round the lake, inhaling freely the clear frosty air, while the pale cold light of the new moon was seen above the trees.

There was so much pent-up vitality in her well-built frame, that it sought a welcome outlet in this exhilarating exercise, and it was only after a long run by herself that it occurred to her to stop and turn round.

She had expected to be followed more or less by

the others, but the whole party—with the exception of midshipman Willock, who was skating in her neighbourhood—was still in the little bay where they had put on their skates, laughing and talking their loudest. Mourier was wholly occupied in giving Elise Falkenberg her first lesson in skating; Jerwel circled adroitly round Anna Valeur, who seemed to have a special attraction for him, and the high-spirited, exacting Beck had condescended to teach a bashful maiden her first moves on the smooth ice.

Cicely felt with some mortification as if she had been excluded from the circle. No one had thought it worth while to follow her.

Jerwel was now seen advancing, with two cousins in tow, whom he released when he reached Cicely.

He really must express his admiration! He had never seen a lady skate so gracefully and surely. Miss Witt ought really to let the young beginners near the shore have the benefit of seeing her skate, an opinion in which Beck loudly acquiesced.

Mourier now suddenly left the shore and came at full speed towards them. He began circling round Cicely, and attempted with great skill to imprison her in all sorts of rings and figures of eight.

He was a master of figure skating, and Cicely and he soon began trying to outvie each other; at last he proposed a race hand in hand up and down the ice.

When they arrived in the neighbourhood of the others for the second time, certain indications led her to believe that Mourier was getting anxious to leave her and continue his interesting lesson to Elise Falkenberg.

She decided then and there to prevent this—not exactly for his sake, but because she had no intention of losing her prestige for the sake of the little "*Miss*" near the shore.

She began rallying her partner, flattering his vanity by letting him feel he was being exposed to the criticism of a beautiful woman. She was in capital spirits, made jests and retaliated on all sides, and in a short time she had most of the company round her, a state of things which he well knew how to appreciate. She felt her importance, and that she ruled the party. Her manners were so enchanting, yet domineering; all sorts of remarks flew about as the skaters glided past each other.

Beck observed it was as much as he could do to look after his legs when Cicely skimmed by . . . . he felt as if a bullet whizzed past his ears.

"He should not lose courage," was the retort.

Shortly after, he had the misfortune, while pirouetting backwards in front of Anna Valeur, to fall, and lay sprawling on the ice.

"What a pity such a pretty woman should be so confoundedly sarcastic," cursed Beck when he got out of earshot.

Cicely had asserted her rights as queen of the party, although, as she felt with a certain bitterness, it had cost her some exertion.

The crescent moon had risen considerably over the ridge of the hill, and the moonlight seemed to lend an easier and more confidential tone to the company.

Cicely saw Karsten paying Wally the attention which was her due. She was but a poor skater and required his support the whole time; then suddenly becoming weary of it all, she would wish to rest.

Cicely watched her brother, thinking what a fine handsome fellow he was. . . . . Surely he and she could take each other's hands in sympathy, and with resignation help each other to battle against the deceitful world! At one time was there anybody more promising than Karsten—and herself! she added, the tears springing to her eyes.

An idea struck her.

She felt such pity for Karsten . . . . he ought to have a little liberty; she was sure he would enjoy taking a flight across the ice and amusing himself among the young girls, if she came to his release.

She steered straight for Wally, and declared she wanted her company for a good long while. She laughed and joked with her, and pulled her over the ice. Wally would only have to stand on her skates and she, Mourier, and Beck would take turns

in towing her along. She knew Wally was not averse to this distinction.

Mourier?

She looked around;—he was on his knees refastening Elise Falkenberg's skates.

"Lieutenant Beck, could you stay and tighten my skates?" cried Cicely.

"Awfully sorry, but I'm afraid Miss Meyer is waiting for me."

Now she saw Jerwel retreating towards a group of young girls where Karsten was conspicuous, talking with the enjoyment of a frisky young colt let loose.

She felt vexed that they should take advantage of the twilight, and slip away from her; yet it was more natural they should enjoy prattling with these girls of fifteen and sixteen.

She was indefatigable in her attention and care for Wally. Young Willock, one of her most devoted slaves, remained at her side assisting her.

Laura Fox joined them, and later on came Martha tugging Captain Turman along by a silk handkerchief.

What would she not give to be so simple-hearted and happy as Martha!

Cicely felt a bitter joy in knowing that her brother at any rate was his frivolous self once more.

If others gave themselves up to enjoyment, why might not he do so too?

Cicely was in exuberant spirits, and did all she could in her amiable way to enliven the company.

How she pulled Wally along! It seemed as if she dragged the heavy burden of her fate behind her.

XIII.

FOR several days Cicely had gone quietly about the house absorbed in her thoughts; an idea had taken possession of her.

It had originated the evening of the skating party as she drove home in her sledge after the day's excursion, embittered and unhappy.

The same thing over and over again all the year round, dressing oneself, going to parties; the same people, the same talk; receiving visitors, pouring out tea, playing, singing, and entertaining; then clearing away and putting everything to rights. . . .

"Oh, if one could only have something to do, some settled work!" But what could she do?

Be a governess? Lecture and domineer over children, as she herself had been domineered over?

She racked her fancy in vain.

She might open a shop for ladies' clothing . . . in quite a small way, or, perhaps, a fancy shop for Berlin work.

Or begin as a modiste?

Not in any provincial town, but in the capital itself. She knew she had good taste.

While Lieutenant Beck was entertaining her with his lively conversation in the bright moonlight, she saw herself enthroned behind a counter, with boxes of ribbons, caps and hat shapes filling the shelves; or writing out bills in a room at the back.

Her customers were urging on their orders—they were going to this party and to that—and received promises which could never be kept; they were all intent on being as fashionable this year as last.

And she herself was happy and busy; saving money to go abroad to study the latest fashions.

Cicely thought of nothing else the next two or three days, and one night the scheme of the modiste's establishment was propounded in the most glowing terms to Martha, as the girls undressed to go to bed.

"Another invitation!" grumbled Cicely, perceiving a note from the Willocks. "Can't we say 'no' for once, mother?"

"Why so? Naturally they are anxious to do something for Karsten and Wally just now."

"I am so heartily tired of it all."

"Because you are so much fêted? Really, my child, you are becoming very captious—Martha must wear her green dress with revers."

"I really think people might find something else to do than be everlastingly inviting one another out. I should like to have some real work; then I could

find a better excuse than a headache," said Cicely, with a proud movement of her head, her mind full of her new plan. "I could say—thank you, I am busy."

"How you do talk, Cicely; this is really folly. Just think if you were so placed in the world that you had to earn your own living! . . . . I suppose you will wear your blue dress?"

"No, the brown will do very well."

"Then at any rate you must wear your deep lace collar and cuffs. Perhaps there will be a little dancing after supper."

"Ugh! I always get such a headache after dancing now."

"You must really look after your temper, Cicely; you will lose all too soon that *something* which is as attractive in a young girl as the bloom on a peach. You have become a little too critical and headstrong of late;—I have often thought of speaking to you about it—you have entered upon a dangerous path—to rule is the privilege of men! There is a little womanly secret which helps you to shine by letting others shine. . . . You have so many advantages, child, but you do not know how to use them. A woman should make herself as amiable as possible; even Martha shows herself to advantage. With her good nature and lively manners, she is sure very soon to feather a nest for herself."

"I think I should choke if I could not speak out

my mind!" said Cicely, so excitedly, that her mother looked up at her intently.

"I have such a longing to set to work at something, mother."

"But you are doing something, my child."

"To go to parties is surely not to be doing anything."

"H'm—I don't see why you should say so," objected her mother, with emphasis. "Wiser heads than yours go there, or else how can you account for meeting so many serious men at parties?"

"Men have their own work, and go out to amuse themselves, and we are to pretend to be doing the same—only to talk nonsense for a change!"

"I think some one is talking nonsense just now!"

"I only mean to say, I don't see why we shouldn't do something, too."

"What? Leave home and become a governess, or teach the German you have learned, do you mean?—No," said Mrs. Witt smiling and eyeing her pretty daughter up and down with satisfaction. "Thank God, there is no necessity for that *as yet*."

"But *now*, mother, I have found something for which I am really fit! There is nothing I should like so much as to become a modiste!"

"A nice idea indeed!—You would supply dresses I suppose, to the friends whom I should mix with in society."

"But it is just the thing for me.'

"Ah, indeed! I can see Laura Fox, Elise Falkenberg and Wally, turning up their noses at you, and perhaps deducting something from the bills because you have supplied them with trimmings or flowers they do not like."

"But I did not mean to stop here."

"Dear me, what a child you are, Cicely. Why, you would have to begin by serving as a dressmaker in one of those establishments."

"I could go somewhere far away, mother."

"Where they had never heard of Commodore Witt? That wouldn't be in *this* country. . . . . I am quite amazed at you; you are over twenty, and yet you come to your mother with such nonsense as this! I know, of course, it is your illness which is the cause of it all, and I suppose we shall have it all over again in the spring. But you should really guard against these melancholy, morbid fancies, against this weariness of everything, Cicely. You may be sure it doesn't leave a good impression. Be pleasant and amiable, and you will find you can enjoy yourself."

"What do you think, Karsten?" asked Mrs. Witt, turning to her son who entered the room, newly shaved and hat in hand, ready to go out; "Cicely has some foolish notion about retiring from the world and going out to earn her own living."

"Oh, yes; when girls get that sort of fit it is always a sure sign they have been disappointed.

They find perhaps their market value is going down in the town, and then they are mad to become governesses in parsonages or in country houses. But with such old-maidish tendencies they won't stand much chance of getting married, by Jove! I only looked in to let you know that Mourier called just now, and told me the party at the Willocks is to be a grand affair. He came from the Falkenbergs, and Elise was busy with her dress; she had known about it since yesterday."

"Ah, indeed!" said Cicely, curtly; "it really seems as if that little brat in her teens is beginning to have too many privileges. I shall wear my blue dress, mother; the brown does not fit at all well, and I must go out and buy some long gloves."

Karsten accompanied her shortly afterwards down the street to Printz's; he was going to the Wanckels.

"I think you are trying to be a little too sharp lately, Cicely, when you go anywhere."

"Yes, of course, one must assume some sort of an air towards men; it won't do to be natural."

"Ah, indeed, I thought that was exactly what you ladies always aimed at; but instead, you must beat us poor men with pickled rods directly we happen to make a slip of the tongue. A woman need not behave in that way just because she happens to have some brains. . . . . But the fact is, Cicely,"—here Karsten beat his leg with his elastic cane; he knew he was

touching upon a dangerous topic—"the fact is, that this biting tongue of yours does not suit you any longer. Quite a young girl can say a good deal, you see; but in the long run—h'm—it does not answer; you are becoming too much of a shrew . . . ."

"Good-bye, Karsten! I have to call on Minka Krog for a pattern," she said, with a touch of sarcasm.

Hurrying down the street she turned the corner by the little red-walled confectioner's shop.

It was not this, however, which attracted her, but Madame Andersen's lending library, where she often went with Laura Fox and other friends.

When, half an hour afterwards, she turned her face homewards, she hid in her elegant skunk muff a much thumbed novel, with the label half torn off the back.

The first of those novels had undoubtedly widened her horizon. Now she devoured them wholesale by night, with the candle on her pillow.

XIV.

ANOTHER long and tedious year passed before Karsten reached the goal of his temporary ambition, —the airing of his distinguished person on the bridge as captain.

This he had accomplished at last, and the following autumn he began to tire already of the many hardships which attended the steamship trade. He was so heartily sick of the beefsteak for breakfast and the salmon and roast veal for dinner day after day the whole summer round. The sugar-covered dessert cake, which crumbled away, growing gradually smaller and smaller during the trip, he could scarcely tolerate.

There were prolonged conferences in both families, at the Wanckels and at the Witts, where preparations for the wedding continued throughout the winter—not however without some little amicable friction.

It was undeniably a charming house which had been fitted up for the young couple, full of comforts which at once gave an impression of Karsten's luxurious taste.

They were married in the spring and went abroad for a few weeks on their wedding tour.

Mrs. Witt felt it was necessary to maintain her authority with proper weight; Karsten with all his liberty was used to his mother's guiding hand and advice.

He was really bound to assert his superior social position to counterbalance the money which Wally brought into the family, if he did not intend to become too dependent upon the Wanckels. And then Wally was not a little exacting in her desire to have Karsten all to herself; surely it was not to Karsten's advantage to marry a Wanckel, but to Miss Wanckel's to become a Witt!

What most troubled Mrs. Witt for the moment was the social aspect of the affair.

It might be expected, too, that the Witts would do something on this happy occasion for the newly-married couple; something more imposing and effective than an ordinary party.

Having considered the matter carefully, she found no alternative but to go to her husband and suggest that they should give a grand ball.

It would, of course, cost them a good deal of money, for it must be on a sumptuous scale to correspond with the grandeur of the Wanckels' affairs, so that Karsten might feel that some honour and glory emanated from him as well.

The more she thought of it, the more importance

she attached to it, and she gradually found that, for other reasons too, the matter would have to be seriously considered.

Such an occasion was an appropriate opportunity for showing off Martha to advantage as daughter of the house.

And Cicely,—Mrs. Witt heaved a deep sigh—hers was a peculiar position. Of course, everybody was greatly taken with her—up to a certain point. But beyond that—anything more serious! She seemed somehow to scare them or keep them off.

After having danced in other people's houses for five or six years, it would be something to show herself at a ball in her father's house.

But all the arrangements for supper, the ices, the champagne! She could see her husband's face on hearing the proposal! how the lines would gather round his mouth; what crushing satire there would be in his smile!

The champagne alone would cost a great deal of money. She would never get her husband to agree to it.

All this caused Mrs. Witt great anxiety. She saw the ball in the king's room, with the imposing portrait in the background. She saw the crowd of uniforms and grand toilettes moving about on the bright floor under the chandeliers; it all became more and more dazzling to her imagination; she could bear it no longer.

She discussed the details of the event with Karsten; the question of the band, the places to be assigned to the married ladies; who should open the ball; how the supper should be served and the card-tables placed. She finished with a sigh.

"But what will father say?"

Karsten knew his father well. But then what an impression it would all make upon his parents-in-law!

Mrs. Witt found to her surprise that Cicely was in favour of the idea. It was quite unusual for her to look pleasant when it was a question of parties and invitations, although on all such occasions she appeared with a bright smile, lively, interested eyes, and the most tasteful dress.

She had long since tired of balls and parties, she no longer found any pleasure in them. Always the same empty, idle way of killing time. But under all this there was an exciting struggle with vanity; her pride would not give way; she must be the first among the girls.

There had been a time when she had not cared whether her dress were creased, or whether it fitted or no. Now the question of her toilet had become a subject of deep reflection, a painful study.

Her mother thought that Cicely bade fair to become the very counterpart of herself; she was

so extremely particular when trying on her dresses, so full of new whims and suggestions. Whatever the cost, her dress must fit. Her gloves were thrown aside on the most trifling pretext. Even Karsten began to respect this change in his sister; every one in the house had to bow before her now.

There was a special reason, however, for her taking such an interest in the proposed ball, and entering into the preparations with the enthusiasm of a girl of seventeen.

Lieutenant Fasting had returned home about this time. He might in all probability be stationed there the whole year, and was going to lodge with the Foxes.

From the moment she heard this her mind was in a turmoil.

During the four years he had been away she had now and then felt some interest in other men, and had met some who had many good and amiable qualities, always allowing for a few trivial faults. She had tried her best to place them as high as possible in her estimation; but to lose herself with any of them, to lose herself so far as to forget the image that ever haunted her—no, never that!

She had known what it meant to feel the fire flash up within her once, and had waited ever since, expecting the old feeling to come back again.

She had fancied it was all forgotten, or in any case so overgrown with other sentiments, that at the

worst she could treat it as a thing of the past ; but now the inspiration which had long been silent broke out anew with ungovernable force.

She watched with feverish expectation to catch a glimpse of him ; she would recognise the well-known figure and gait far away, among ever so many.

And then the ball ; perhaps she would meet him there for the first time !

Her mother had completed all her arrangements with due consideration for the Wanckels, Karsten, and her daughters.

To crown all, Karsten had sent her a case of champagne, of the brand he had ordered for his own cellar from Messrs. Barnett et fils, of Rheims.

The Commodore stood like a rock in the surging sea ; the waves dashed over him, but he remained unmoved.

" His head had not been turned with Karsten's luxury, and he did not intend to be affected by it," he said.

" He must hear the main argument, then," Mrs. Witt declared. " People were wondering if Commodore Witt would soon resign. Now he must really show that he was still in full vigour, and could hold his own as well as ever. In their position, people were bound every now and then to prove that they could fulfil their social duties."

Mrs. Witt had her own reason for giving the ball

at an early date—if possible, the following week. A letter had arrived from Jan, telling them that he had been appointed captain to the large iron vessel *Lucida*, trading between Newport and Bremen with petroleum. He was to join his ship at Bremen in April, and had arranged meanwhile to spend some time in Norway, and to pay a visit to the Witts.

Mrs. Witt was not much attracted by the prospect of having Skipper Börresen figuring at her ball, nor of celebrating a home-coming which carried with it an odour of petroleum.

In the course of the week Cicely had a new dress made, then taking a dislike to it, she had it altered and remade. It was taken off and put on, then tried by candle-light to see if it suited her complexion, hair and figure.

Her fancy took inventories of all Wally's new toilettes from abroad, wondering if it would be possible to steal from them any idea which might prove useful to her.

Lieutenant Fasting had called upon the family the day before the ball. It was a short visit, and Cicely had not gone into the room. She had not the courage to meet him for the first time on such an everyday occasion—was almost afraid of the old, foolish reserve and confusion which he had so much misunderstood.

It was strictly enjoined that no one should walk along the passage, in order that Cicely might get a couple of hours' sleep that afternoon before the ball; she looked so poorly, her mother thought.

"Upon my word, what next, I wonder!" grumbled the Commodore, as he was made to steal softly up the creaking stairs.

Nobody knew that Cicely had lain awake with unclosed eyes the whole night.

She felt nervous and uneasy when the hour came for her to dress.

And now, after many inspections, she stood triumphantly before the looking-glass for a last survey, and heard confirmed in words, what she could see for herself,—she was looking perfectly beautiful this evening.

By skilful management, and by carefully prolonging her toilet, she arrived in the ball-room an hour after the time punctiliously arranged by the Commodore. She wished to appear on the scene fresh and sparkling; and then, as she thought, her *entrée* would be more effective, if people were waiting for her!

XV.

THE last of the guests had departed, and the candles in the ball-room chandeliers were being extinguished. A strong light shone through the open door of a side room, where the dessert table stood with its tall vases, remnants of ices, jellies, and cakes, and a number of empty glasses on the wine-stained cloth.

"I think I must make you useful, my dear Wally," exclaimed Mrs. Witt, "and ask you to help Cicely and Martha upstairs to put the bedrooms in order. We had to make dressing and cloak rooms of them for the evening. You see I treat you quite as one of the family. You looked so remarkably well to-night in your dark red velvet; just like a young wife. I hope you enjoyed yourself?" she added, following Wally to the door.

"Nella," called Mrs. Witt, "please bring me a bottle of champagne from the basket. I feel quite feverish and thirsty,—two clean glasses, Nella. I must have a little chat with Karsten after all this. The time for quiet chats with him is over now, as I dare say you have noticed, Nella; *now*, there will always be a third person."

"Karsten, a glass of champagne before we part, won't you?"

Karsten was walking up and down the ball-room in the half-light, smoking a cigar. His mother went up to him, took his arm and walked through the long room to the dessert table, with an air of satisfaction.

"Thanks, Nella! help yourself to some dessert, and take away the glasses that have been used; I think I may say, Karsten, that the evening has been a success in every respect. And your father—he was really himself again, he reminded me of old times when he was in his prime on the quarter-deck. And Martha, what did you think of her? I could scarcely believe my own eyes; she made quite a sensation!"

"Newly out, you know, mother; it is there the charm lies."

"Yes, but it wasn't the success a girl generally makes at a ball; there was really something about her which took them all by storm, she looked so bright and lively. She was absolutely mobbed; and those who didn't get a chance of dancing with her came and sang her praises to me; Jerwel, Schmidt, and Drejer quite persecuted me. It's not difficult to see that she is mistress of her own future!" Mrs. Witt concluded, still meditating over her discovery.

"Your health, mother!" laughed Karsten, leaning

comfortably back in an easy chair, and sipping his wine.

"I really think that you are beginning to grow stout, Karsten," said his mother; "and yet it is not unbecoming. I noticed you did not exert yourself much in dancing to-night."

"Pooh! mother," he replied, blowing the cigar smoke straight before him—he had been drinking a good deal during the evening—"a man who is married and settled down for life! One's interests change so wonderfully. When one has grown up children to chaperone, it will be time enough to give oneself up to the pleasures of dancing again."

"And Cicely, Karsten,—she was a decided success."

"Ye-es," he yawned.

"She looked exceedingly well; and then she is so clever in knowing how to enliven the people round her."

"I almost wish she was a little more stupid. The fellows seem as if they were a bit afraid of her, the devil knows why!"

Mrs. Witt sat with her glass in her lap, deep in thought. Where could her eyes have been? Martha was really a lovely child.

Karsten was half way into the land of dreams, his head bent over the back of the chair exposing his shiny forehead, which was getting bald of late. He awoke when Wally returned. She thought

they ought to be going home some time, and was in a great hurry to put on her things.

Martha was up in her room undressing, and humming to herself some of the dance music.

She was in great spirits and had heaps of amusing stories to tell Cicely. She recalled one thing and then another, and would sit down every now and again when she came to any point of moment in her stories.

Then she would get up and continue undressing, humming to herself the while. She had never cared for dancing, but to-night she did not mind, now that——

"Perhaps only another month." Martha closed her eyes, lost in her own thoughts. She had been in a kind of fever since the arrival of Jan's last letter; at one moment she felt inclined to laugh, at another to cry.

She had enjoyed herself immensely to-night; so many pleasant things came into her mind.

"I am in bed now, Cicely," she said, sitting half up. "Are you never going to be ready? I shall soon be asleep. Don't you think it was an awfully nice ball? Just look how long and disconsolate my dress looks hanging there!" Martha went on, bursting out laughing. "Everything seems to be dancing before my eyes still," she murmured shortly afterwards, in a sleepy tone.

Cicely stood before the looking-glass, lost in thought. The thick candle, burnt nearly to the end, threw a yellow light on her figure, as she stood gazing absently into the glass.

She felt quite clear about the result of the evening—she was sick to death with disappointment, and free to look dispassionately down the long vista of her future.

Lieutenant Fasting had come up to Martha and herself in his easy, self-possessed way early in the evening. She remembered how the lights in the room seemed to swim before her eyes. His face bore signs of having weathered many storms and gales, while he had been attending to the building of his lighthouses on the coast; but it still wore the bright, half-serious smile.

He greeted them cordially, although his manner was rather constrained. She noticed how he started when he looked at her more closely, and how he tried to keep his composure. She felt that she turned terribly pale herself. It was an important moment in their lives.

"Quite unchanged I see, Miss Witt!" he said with a smile, bowing and gliding past her.

He came from the card-room between the games from time to time and stood in the doorway; the look of admiration with which he followed her could not be mistaken, but—the eyes were cold, she felt that they were examining her critically; not a spark

of the old look in them! And he had left directly after supper.

It was all over—her dreams were at an end! Yes, and there should be an end now to something else. For a long time she had looked upon these parties and balls as part of her duty in life, but always with a shudder. Now she would tolerate them no longer! What more had she to do with them? Now at any rate, she would assert herself.

More than once lately she had had a suspicion that the men settled amongst themselves who should pay her most attention; and this evening, no doubt, many of her partners had danced with her as a matter of duty.

She gazed at herself in the mirror. She was really very handsome—that neck, those shoulders—and such a dress!

She was conscious that her mouth shaped itself into the satirical *moue* it usually wore, when occasion called for one of her cutting replies.

She thought she gave people the impression of being cold and without feeling, while all the time a fever was raging within her. She was unmerciful in the expression of her opinion when she was forced to be entertaining. There was something of the edge of a razor about her, Karsten said. She became stiff and proud, as easily hurt as red-hot iron—and all the result of her artificiality.

But this evening she had entered the ball-room in

no such mood. It was now—afterwards—that she felt like this, when disappointment had thrown its icy veil over her.

As she undressed and placed one article after another on the sofa, she tried to analyse all that had happened.

There lay her ball dress, with her shoes and flowers carefully arranged on the top.

It was as though she had spread a shroud over her youth and hope.

XVI.

It was not easy to understand where Martha had got her information, but she had been out before six o'clock this morning in the drizzling rain, and had returned home for breakfast flushed and excited ; with the excuse that she had wanted a good long walk.

Without any one knowing, she put on her things and went out again.

The wind rushed in through the door as she opened it, and outside the flag line was beating monotonously against the staff.

On and on she went, scarcely aware which direction she took till she reached the little watch-house where she had been at break of day. The wind whistled and howled round her, catching her clothes as she stood there intently gazing out over the grey sea.

Clouds heavy with rain lay like a misty border, and shut out the horizon. A ship might appear in sight at any moment.

To the south the white-crested billows rose one behind the other, chased each other, and then sank again, leaving a glimpse of dangerous, grey-black,

sunken rocks. A few sea-gulls soared backwards and forwards at the entrance of the harbour, and then set out to sea, where two large vessels were beating about under double-reefed topsails, their black yards peering through the mist.

Time after time Martha thought she distinguished smoke among the shadows on the horizon, and found it was only dark, threatening clouds which rose in that direction.

Some of the dearest moments in their life were associated with this old watch-house, and she had written to say she would be up there when the steamer arrived. She knew he would be on the look-out for her.

She paced to and fro to quiet her restlessness, and then sat down on the bench, trying to picture to herself how he would look, how he would treat her, and how it would all end. She was hardly able to think, her mind was so taken up with happy expectations.

There! . . . . there out of the midst of the fog came the steamer!

She stood straining her eyes and holding her breath. The clouds of smoke grew larger, and lay like a long black streak across the sea.

She could not remember how long she remained riveted to the spot; she stood like one transfixed. The hair on her forehead had become wet, and her cloak was damp and heavy with the moisture.

The steamer grew nearer and nearer, and every-

thing on board showed more clearly, till all at once she saw the vessel right below her, noisily making its way into the harbour. It was so near she could almost have shouted down to the people on deck.

Aft by the gunwale somebody was rapturously waving his cap to her.

She waved her handkerchief, scarcely aware that the other hand with the umbrella waved too.

She stared through her tears, and recognised Jan by the way he carried his head; he was shouting some message to her.

She hurried home and ran upstairs to the passage window to see the passengers landing from the steamer out in the harbour.

She heard Cicely remark to her mother, who was busy at the linen-press:

"Jan might come by the steamer to-day; who knows?"

"For goodness' sake don't talk about it. Let us hope he won't be here for another fortnight, at least."

Martha pressed her head closely to the window-pane to hide her face, as Cicely came and stood beside her and looked out.

"I wish we had the glasses, and then we could see who comes ashore in the boat."

But Martha had long ago discovered Jan. She ran down for the glasses and was back again in a moment, gazing through them attentively.

"Can you see any one?"

"H'm, I . . . . Would you like to look?"

But she kept the glasses, instead of giving them to her sister, and looked through them again and again. The boat was close to the wharf.

"Let me have them, Martha!"

"You shall have them directly."

But she did not take them from her eyes till Jan had landed, and stood on the wharf.

"I wasn't sure myself. I thought——"

"It isn't easy to recognise any one among the crowd," said Cicely, peering through the glass.

Martha was gone.

She had rushed downstairs and had opened the front door before Jan could ring the bell, and met him with a face flushed with crying, and aglow with excitement.

"Jan, Jan!" she cried, as she pulled him tremblingly into the hall. The next moment they held each other in a long and close embrace, as if to assure themselves that the whole thing was not a dream.

Suddenly she started, she heard a noise, and had only time to whisper:

"Don't say anything to day, Jan!"—when Cicely came running down the stairs with a cry of surprise.

"Why, is it really Jan?"

"Yes, here he is, Cicely!"

"What a black beard! How sunburnt! You

look as if you were tanned! I have been so looking forward to your coming; you can't imagine. Now we shall have some fun again. You mustn't look after Martha only *this* time, you know," she said, jestingly, while he was hanging up his coat and cap. "What a man you have grown! Are you still the same height, do you think? We must measure before I let you go in."

He started as he looked at her.

"And as for you, Cicely, why, you have changed too. That is to say—you're none the less pretty," he said, correcting himself as he eyed her. "But you seem to have become somebody here. Tell me, do you rule the roost now?"

"Ah, you evidently want mother to look after you again!" laughed Cicely. "You had better come in."

"Father, just fancy, here is Jan!" she cried through the study door, and then ran upstairs to call her mother.

Jan and Martha were left by themselves in the sitting-room. The London eight-day clock and the large lithographs of the king and queen in black frames danced before her eyes. It was real; they were together once more; there they stood staring at each other.

Martha was a full-grown young woman now—yet still the same unselfish, headstrong girl, whom at first he had striven so hard to forget, and since risked everything to win—no trace in her,

as in the other sister, of the *blasé* woman of the world.

And Martha saw in his face the traces of toil and trouble; there was something like a line of anxiety round his eyes, and under his chin she noticed a deep, white scar.

"So that is why you wear a beard, Jan!" she exclaimed, stroking the scar, feeling that it had been gained in his struggle to win her.

His beard and broad shoulders made him look rather square-built; the stout, strong neck, round which he wore a handkerchief, was brown as the bark of a tree.

"Let me see the boy!" said the Commodore, in in the doorway. "Well done, my dear fellow! Scarcely twenty-six and your own master! The boy is going to stop here, of course," he said, turning to his wife. Mrs. Witt had given herself time to put on another cap, and received Jan in a mild friendly way, which, however, was not quite free from a touch of coldness.

"You ought not to say *boy* any longer, Witt. Jan Börresen has now become quite"—she paused to find a word—"quite a captain."

"Thanks, but my luggage has gone to the hotel, and I have ordered a room there."

"Nonsense, you know your room is always ready for you."

"Thanks; but I do not know what hour I may

have to start, so I must be ready at a moment's notice."

"I'll listen to none of that. You'll have to stop here, whether it's for little or for long," said the Commodore, cutting short all objections.

"The room Jan used to have is used as a lumber room now, but Nella is sure to do her best to put it in order," said Mrs. Witt, stiffly.

"It shall be ready by to-night, exactly as he had it in the old times," Nella promised, warmly, when Martha came into the kitchen with the order. Jan and Nella were good old friends.

After dinner it happened that Martha had to go to the dressmaker's to try on her new spring dress.

Miss Matheson was quite overwhelmed with work —every one wanted their spring dresses at this time of the year—and Mrs. Witt thought it best for Martha to go and see how the dress was getting on.

Martha gave Jan a look. He, of course, wanted to accompany her, but Mrs. Witt managed to detain him.

Jan must stay and tell her a little about himself and his affairs. His prospects depended, of course, to some degree upon the prices of petroleum? Was he satisfied with the managers? Things had come to a strange pass in those parts, but fortunately it wasn't necessary to mix oneself up very much with the state of things over there.

"Be quick, Martha, and go."

"So they are really honest, good folk? Well yes, of course there must be exceptions."

Martha went out of the room casting a look of disappointment at Jan.

Mrs. Witt continued the conversation with Jan for some time and then left the room.

"I hope you haven't forgotten that we take coffee at half-past three?" she remarked in the doorway.

Jan stood twisting his cap, and wondering if he could slip out after Martha, giving as an excuse that he was going to fetch his luggage from the hotel, or must he wait for Mrs. Witt's coffee?

Cicely sat looking intently at him now and then. It seemed as if he brought with him fresh breezes from the sea.

"You said I was changed, Jan," she ventured. "You must have meant something by it. Perhaps you think I have begun to look older?"

"How can a girl of two or three and twenty begin to show the weight of years?"

"A girl of two or three and twenty is old, Jan," exclaimed Cicely, excitedly. She felt she needed a confidant. "Her best days are over just when you men begin to work."

"There seems to be plenty of life and strength in you, Cicely; you don't look as if you were done for yet."

"Oh, no, I shall look all right for a few years

more, if that is what you mean; but one is like a flower, Jan, in a glass of water.

"Well, but you will get married sooner or later; how impatient girls are to be sure," he laughed.

"Indeed, you think one ought to get caught, —on a golden hook, etc.?"

"Well, I think there are plenty who would go on their knees to you; for instance——"

"Don't trouble yourself with instances. You look so full of life, Jan," she said, changing the subject; "you don't know how I envy you."

Chatting with Jan did Cicely good, and it reminded Jan so much of the days when they were playmates together that for the moment he felt inclined to disburden himself to her.

But he remembered that he would be too late to meet Martha.

"Would you like to have a pair of fists like these?" he asked, holding up two brawny hands as he went towards the door and hurried out.

Mrs. Witt found so much for Martha to do that day; and Martha went hither and thither in the most absent manner, continually misunderstanding her mother's orders. She was in a very anxious frame of mind, and felt as if she were walking on red-hot cinders. She was wondering all the time whether Jan was in the sitting-room, and whether the crisis was at hand. Now the secret would be re-

vealed, the secret she had carried about with her all these years!

She fell into a reverie, trying to imagine what her parents and Cicely and Karsten would say. She constantly pictured herself standing in a state of trepidation in the austere presence of her mother.

The Commodore was taken by surprise when, as he sat in his rocking-chair in the twilight, Martha came and nestled at his feet and slipped her hand into his. He stroked her chin caressingly, and felt a little astonished perhaps.

She had only an opportunity of whispering a few words to Jan as she glided past him before the lamp was lit.

And when all the rest of the evening they sat round the table busied with their various occupations, she could not fix her attention on anything. Now and then she would fortify herself by looking at Jan, but she could not utter a word. She kept her eyes upon her mother's face, wondering what it would look like to-morrow morning when she learnt the reason of Jan's return.

And Jan for his part did his best. He only once answered absently; which caused Cicely to laugh at him and ask him if his head was still a-sailing after the voyage. Otherwise he was busy watching Martha at her sewing. He thought it very strange she should have to undo her seam so many times in the course of the evening.

When the time came to say "good-night" they found a moment in which to press each other's hands. They both tried to look brave, and to inspire each other with courage.

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The Commodore was in a good humour the next morning, and chatted pleasantly at the breakfast table over his coffee.

Jan sat pale and absent-minded, nervously turning his bread-and-butter over and over, and answered briefly and politely the questions put to him.

He intended to broach the subject directly after breakfast and to ask for a conversation with his uncle and aunt—he anxiously wondered what would happen if he met with a rebuff. He felt so powerless; he could not tear Martha away from her parents.

Martha could hardly bear to see Jan sitting there looking so dejected.

Perhaps mother would be blind enough to set her heart against him.

Then she grew calm and restful, she knew quite well what she would do; nothing should shake her from her determination. A spirit of defiance was rising within her. She was Jan's above everything—even her parents could not be considered!

If the house had fallen about her ears it could not have surprised Mrs. Witt more than Jan's proposal.

A fury of indignation was raging in her bosom. But the imminent necessity of preventing the Commodore from giving his opinion caused her to control herself. She had the greatest difficulty in keeping him from acting on the impulse of the moment, and giving any sort of promise, no matter how ill-advised. She firmly maintained that they must have time to consider so important a matter.

Mr. Börresen and their daughter had certainly not shown much sincerity or straightforwardness in their behaviour; in any case it could scarcely be said that he had made an honourable use of his stay under their roof!

After the first inevitable outburst, she began to appeal to Jan's own feelings—he surely would not think it so unreasonable if they, as parents, took a little time before coming to a decision with which they could reconcile their conscience.

Mrs. Witt was quite excited and flushed when she came out of the room after the interview. She had anyhow succeeded in postponing the matter.

But she was boiling with rage; Martha, who really had such a future before her! And then to be taken on board by a skipper Börresen, as if she were a petroleum cask!

"Fancy Martha having kept this to herself for four years!" exclaimed Cicely, bursting into the room. "She has just told me everything. I don't think

it's right to torture them any longer ; they do love one another so ! "

" Dear me, Cicely, surely you are not going to lose your head over this ! You ought to have sense enough to understand that it is all a childish, romantic caprice of Martha's. How can she know yet whom she really ought to marry ? "

" Well, if she cannot, nobody else can. But one cannot presume for an instant that because two people love one another they are ever likely to get one another," replied Cicely, bitterly.

" It is neither your father's intention nor mine to object to any one whom Martha may choose, if we only knew they were really serious about it, even if we had to resign ourselves to the blow of seeing her become a skipper's wife. But I do think it is quite necessary they should take time to know more of each other now they are grown up."

" Is it to reckon as nothing that Jan has worked and striven to be worthy of her all these years ? He has now money enough to marry upon. I think he has done wonders ; and he is only twenty-six ! "

" You do talk so foolishly, Cicely ! A man is obliged to work and try to get on in the world in any case. It sounds all very well to say it was all done for Martha's sake, but for my part I can quite understand that Jan would like to have one of Commodore Witt's daughters for a wife. When we come to consider the matter, it is Martha, our child, whom

we must consider first of all. She has so little judgment yet. It is only a girlish fancy. She must really see a little of the world first and learn to know her own mind."

"Surely, mother, you wouldn't wish Martha to tell him, after he has placed such faith in her—that she will wait a little and look round to see if she can find some one else? I should think in such a case he would have done with her there and then," said Cicely, with an impatient gesture of the hand.

Mrs. Witt, noticing so much warmth in her tone, felt tempted to remind her that there was a limit to everything; but at present it was of more importance to get Cicely to take her view of the case.

"It was, of course, Jan's adventurous life at sea which at first had attracted Martha, and made him a hero in her eyes. Would you let her go on believing in her romance in this blind fashion, Cicely? No!" said Mrs. Witt shaking her head; "Martha is full of deep-rooted, fanciful notions of her own, she gives herself up to them heart and soul."

"She will never love any one else, mother; I know Martha so well."

"Perhaps so; she unfortunately seems to cling to this one idea. But when we look at it in a practical way, Martha's nature appears to me in quite a different light; she is so very impressionable. For instance, what did you think about her the night of the ball? Judge from what you saw yourself Cicely!

I don't think she had many thoughts for her dear Jan *that* evening. She was so flattered with all the homage paid to her, she was quite a different being. I could see it was possible that she might look favourably on one or other of those who paid her so much attention; besides, this was really her first appearance, and her experience is only just beginning."

Cicely did not answer; she remembered how overjoyed Martha had been up in her room, chatting away all the time, so full of her happiness.

"No, Cicely—she has not tried the world yet; we must all use our influence to help her to gain some experience in life. When Jan has gone, her mind will be open to other impressions—don't misunderstand me, your father and I have no idea of making her give him up. We only wish to postpone the matter for a year or so before we let her decide. She ought to have a little time to compare Mr. Jan Börresen with the ideal sailor she has pictured to herself—perhaps she will then feel there is no immediate hurry—but we must leave it all to her, of course."

"She will never alter her mind, mother, about him."

"All the better. We only wish she should not rush and throw herself away blindly. You *must* agree with me in this, Cicely; surely they ought not to object to their feelings for one another being put to the test?"

"They know so *perfectly* well what they both want, mother; but I suppose they must submit when you and father insist so strongly."

It was not in her usual careful manner that Mrs. Witt, when alone in her room, fell to arranging the curls on her forehead. She had come to some understanding with Cicely—it would not do to give her sanction to this too hurriedly—but there had been a struggle.

With a sigh of exhaustion she closed her eyes.

Jan might easily impress a young girl; she was not blind to that—but every young girl had to fight against these first impressions. She could not let the child leave the sphere of refined life in which she had been born and bred, to become the wife of an American captain, in some faraway seaport.

It would not do to give in on this point; it was she who would be held responsible for everything unpleasant in the family.

Next day Jan and Martha came home after an early morning walk together.

Mrs. Witt was much annoyed and after breakfast she called Martha into her room.

As long as everything remained unsettled she would insist that Martha in her intercourse with Jan Börresen, should treat him as other men. The only place where they could meet under present circumstances was under the eyes of everybody in the

sitting-room. Besides, she had expected that Jan would feel himself in honour bound not to be on a familiar footing before he had the right. "One who was more of our—what shall I call it—way of thinking would, of course, have felt this."

More than a week passed in this way. They scarcely saw one another except in the sitting-room. A touch of the hands on the stairs, a whisper on the landing before going to bed ; one single embrace and a burning kiss in the dark.

And, at last, Jan's lot became heavier than he could bear, and one day he lost all patience and told Martha he had never gone through such a terrible experience in his life! He could not go on in this way from day to day, scarcely daring to look at her.

His cool and experienced judgment did not deceive him ; he knew from what quarter the wind was blowing, and what was behind Mrs. Witt's "honeyed words," as he called them. His face wore such a pained, suffering look that Martha was often tempted to break bounds and declare openly that, come what might, Jan and she *were* and *should be* engaged.

The Commodore felt that his daughter's appealing eyes were always upon him. As one might gaze at a distant streak of land on the horizon, so the Commodore looked back upon his youth with its love and passion, fire and follies, and he swore to himself by his hope of salvation, that they should have one

another in a year—if Martha was of the same mind then as now.

Until then things would have to remain as his wife wished!

She was right in insisting that they should take their time, and consider fully a matter so important as marriage.

He liked having a chat with Jan in the sitting-room about freights and sailors' pay; and when these subjects had been fully discussed he felt there were other things he ought to speak about; then he would become embarrassed and would sit awhile and h'm and haw, and finally retire to his study.

Karsten from the beginning pretended to know nothing of what had happened. He thought Martha had taken leave of her senses. The best thing to be done now was to get cousin Jan off on his voyage before anything was known in the town. The last two weeks had passed quietly enough, and in two or three more he would be gone.

Mr. Witt, on her part, did not feel at all comfortable. She believed she saw Jan's dark sparkling eyes exchange significant glances with Martha, and at times they seemed charged with defiance. The air, she felt, was full of unspoken messages.

But Mrs. Witt understood with great tact how to be always on the watch. On occasions when there might be an opportunity for Jan and Martha to meet in the sitting-room, she always managed to be pre-

sent, or she found something for Martha to do in the house. They might as well have been a thousand miles apart!

The whole of yesterday afternoon and evening Martha had been waiting in hope that they might steal a moment to themselves, and just before bed-time her mother had asked her to go up to her father's bedroom and read to him till he went to sleep.

This evening she hung about the sitting-room hoping for a few words with him. But when her mother called to her from the landing, and she heard that she had to go up and read to her father again, she became desperate.

Not so much as "Good-night" to Jan this evening either!

She burst out crying, and sobbed so violently that Mrs. Witt thought it best to take her into her own bedroom.

"You must really learn to control yourself a little, Martha, and not go on in this way. They'll hear you all over the house!"

But her words were wasted on Martha; she looked at her mother with such an unhappy expression in her eyes, and then threw herself on her mother's bed and buried herself in the pillow.

"Would she never be allowed to talk to Jan?"

She had looked forward to his return so much, and now——

"Why have you taken such a dislike to him, mother?" she burst out; then regretting what she had said, she ran to her mother and kneeling down sobbed:

"Oh, no, no; I did not mean that, I did not mean it. I know you are so kind and good, mother, dear mother; you must let me have Jan! You must, do you hear? Father will say 'Yes' if only you will; we will be so fond of you, mother; you will see how we will love you."

Martha was almost frantic, and looked up into her mother's face, trying to find some spark of hope there.

Her mother, much concerned, bent over her shaking her head; she felt she could hate this outsider who had broken into her family and brought them so much sorrow.

"I cannot love any one else in the world except Jan, only Jan!" wailed Martha. "Mother, I want to be Jan's; you shall not part us."

Mrs. Witt, noticing her feverish, excited state, placed her on the sofa and began to calm her by talking quietly to her.

Why could she not wait a year, when her father and mother both thought it necessary for her own welfare?

Martha continued crying and sobbing while her mother talked and comforted her, gave her the smelling salts and shortly after a few drops of

naphtha. She must not go to bed before mother could see her little girl more herself again. She ought to know it was all for her good.

But all this caused Mrs. Witt much anxiety. It evidently would never do to let it go on. Jan did not appear to understand at all that, under the circumstances, he ought to go away. Every day they were together made matters worse. There was a danger that the idea might become so fixed in the child's mind that she would never be able to get rid of it.

Early next morning Mrs. Witt drove out to see Karsten.

Martha and Cicely had gone on some errand to Mrs. Falkenberg, who had the dressmaker in the house; and afterwards they were to go on to the Foxes, and look over the new fashion-plates.

Mrs. Witt only returned as the cloth was being laid for dinner. Karsten had made her stay and drink some chocolate.

She had brought home good news! She had been into father's study with it; what a merciful thing for Martha; she could really hardly believe it! "Fancy, Karsten and Wally have expressly invited you to go with them on their trip abroad—three months—and since we are having such fine spring weather, they intend going by the steamer on Friday—only three days to get ready! We *shall* want the dressmaker now; we shall have to help her as much as we can."

"What did they say at the Foxes, Cicely? Only to-morrow—we must have her here at once, this afternoon; you must tell Mrs. Fox the reason."

"Really, Martha, I don't wish for any fuss or nonsense. This is such an important matter for you. I think you should use your senses a little and be grateful that such a treat should fall to your lot. And it may happen that this fortunate event may be good for other reasons, too," she said significantly, as Martha, almost stupefied, followed her out of the room. "Mr. Börresen's want of tact in staying on here seems to be worrying the life out of you. You have not been yourself at all of late. The sooner the trial begins the better for you both; can't you understand that?"

Martha did not look as if she understood in the least.

She stood mute and thunderstruck, pale as death. She could scarcely realise it all. She was to be parted from Jan!

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Down in the sitting-room they sat sewing the whole afternoon and evening. It was half-past eleven before they laid aside their work and went to bed.

Martha sat up in her room quiet, lost in thought, on the side of her bed, making no attempt to undress. There was something defiant about her—every now and then she would start and listen intently.

She must be left in peace to think over her sorrow, thought Cicely. They were both greatly to be pitied; but perhaps it was best after all to make an end of this long torture.

She lay quite quiet, without speaking.

Shortly afterwards Martha put out the light, and Cicely fancied she heard her open the door and go out, leaving it ajar.

Cicely thought she afterwards heard a quiet, repeated knocking at Jan's door.

She evidently wanted to speak to him, poor girl.

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It was as if Mrs. Witt had got over a great anxiety, and breathed freely again. It had really been a period of great pain and difficulty.

Now she was quite herself again, and the preparations for Martha's journey were speedily progressing under her skilful auspices.

There were only two days left; it was most painful to see Jan's and Martha's distress. How easy would it not have been for Mrs. Witt to give her sanction to the engagement and let them have one another, as father and Cicely had urged upon her.

The moon threw its faint light high up on the wall, as Martha's shadow glided along the passage. She wanted to tell Jan all she had to say on that last evening.

He received her at the door, pale and trembling, and stroked her hair tenderly, lovingly.

They held each other in a close embrace ; there was a wild sorrow about their leave-taking.

When they at last parted they had taken a final decision. This was not a separation. When he returned in four or five months she would follow him, regardless of everything, and they would settle in their new home over in America.

XVII.

CICELY was accustomed to the cadets and the other young men of the town turning round and looking after her when she was out walking. She was getting quite accustomed to this act of homage, and had a somewhat sarcastic conviction of its value. It was an understood thing that she was handsome, and her self-esteem did not let her doubt for a moment that she would have attracted an equal amount of attention in any other town.

It was, of course, flattering to live as a kind of decoration for drawing-room and street, but what other satisfaction did she derive. Surely this could not be considered a life worth living!

All who had work and interest could be said to live; Jan and Martha lived—although the world was harsh to them just now, the one languishing in Switzerland, and the other on the Atlantic. Karsten had written home and said that Martha was evidently born to be a ship-owner or a ship-broker; unfortunately her chief delight seemed to consist in burying herself in the newspapers at the hotels, studying the shipping news.

Martha had at any rate something to take an interest in; although she cried, perhaps, when night came, and she laid her head on her pillow; but Cicely had nothing at all to cry or laugh over; she had only to make herself pleasant and smile, and avoid being candid as best she could—she was no longer naïve and young enough to speak her mind.

Was there nothing in the world for her to do? She had got beyond the stage of wishing to become a modiste, and die with a needle in her hand, since one day when she had seen poor little hard-working Miss Mathison cough up a little ball which proved to consist of the bitten-off ends of thread which she must have been chewing and swallowing. This was no doubt the only remarkable event in her life of drudgery.

A governess?—How could she undertake with a clear conscience to train these little goslings, who were only to be taught to stretch their necks, and whose lives afterwards would be smothered in artificiality—that is to say, if they were not gifted with the same sort of light, easy nature as Laura Fox, who could adapt herself to any circumstances.

Laura was one of those who enjoy telling a bit of scandal—such and such a person lived a terrible life, and such and such a person lived a still more terrible one; whatever it might be they had done. She was so insipid, so very insipid—really the last

person whom Cicely would wish to have so much intercourse with Fasting. He was so busy this summer with his work, and never went out anywhere; and Laura was now interested in nothing but harbour-works, maps, and lighthouses.

Cicely could not resist a quiet laugh with Lieutenant Beck at Laura's expense. She had actually made her brother Jess row her out in a boat, in order to learn how they dredged the entrance to the harbour!

And the fact that Lieutenant Fasting was on the spot, helped to make Cicely all the more uneasy. She must try and remember that he was nothing to her now. He was busy with his plans, making good progress—and she felt sick at heart when she reflected that all this did not in the least concern her; she had nothing to do with it.

There were times when she felt the whole world was dead to her.

When by chance they met, she became cold as marble; she thought herself quite indifferent now.

At the commencement of the summer, callers and and visitors came as of old. Things were more lively perhaps when they were present, but strangely dismal again when they were gone.

At times an uncontrollable desire for work came upon her.

"I almost think your head is too full of ideas, Cicely," said her mother, impatient at being again

troubled with her daughter's unreasonable notions. "Why don't you keep up your morning and evening walks?"

"I really cannot bear putting on my things day after day, going out and coming back again—just like a squirrel in its cage treading the wheel."

"I must say you are very complimentary to make such comparisons about your own home; you will some day find out what it is to have a good home, and get whatever you want by holding up your little finger; but it is bad for people to have everything they want in this world."

"Yes, mother, that is just what I think; I am too comfortable here at home; I don't think it is good for me to go on in this way all my life just fulfilling a daughter's duties."

"If you really want an occupation, there are so many things you might turn your hand to. Why not learn to paint on porcelain with Mrs. Scharfenberg? And why don't you go on with your singing lessons? You used to take such pleasure in them."

"I have no talent for one or the other. I had good taste; but I could not very well use that," she remarked bitterly. "There surely ought to be something I could learn. I'm not exactly stupid."

"You know German and English, why not translate books?"

"Thank you, I am aware of all those neat and

suitable occupations which one can take to in one's home."

"All this is mere peevishness and bad temper, Cicely. You have both your parents to live for; I should think that vocation enough. But it is all this unfortunate hankering of yours to be something else than what you are."

A short time after, Cicely was seen to take the silver from the sideboard and begin to rub and polish it.

Mrs. Witt was occupied with dreams of Karsten's future.

He was living in a style which delighted his luxurious nature; how could any one believe he had no ambition! But Karsten must lead a comfortable life, as she herself had always wanted to do; and the time would come when his personality would attract attention.

Her plans for her son's future were not a little ambitious.

And what comfort it gave her to think that Karsten was living near her. Next winter Martha would have to come out in earnest; she had finished last season by becoming a star . . . . She would always have to be dressed in a homely kind of style; it would be a mistake to deck her out like a gorgeous flower. She had looked so charming in her simple cherry-coloured dress last spring.

And the trip abroad with all its new impressions would probably drive away the childish fancy she had dreamt about and nourished in her loneliness,—and then the whole affair would be finished with a nice sensible letter to Jan. He would be much better off with a nice girl from one of the boarding-houses at which he stopped.

XVIII.

CICELY'S interest in Lieutenant Fasting—in spite of all she had schooled herself to think this summer—was not dead yet. Every step he took and everything that was said about him, caused every fibre in her body to vibrate.

Laura Fox, her brother Jess, and the Lieutenant were always out on sailing excursions together. It occupied her not a little; almost against her will she stood by the window and followed the boat with her eyes, as it put off from the wharf.

What could Lieutenant Fasting be thinking of? It was a puzzle to her.

The long quiet summer seemed never to come to an end. The only person in the house who was pleased was the Commodore, who could never get enough of the warm weather; it drove his rheumatism away, besides it was the quietest time in the year at the dockyard.

Every one became busier and more lively when Karsten came back with Wally and Martha, all three in foreign travelling costumes.

There had been no end to Karsten's kindness to

Martha, a whole winter outfit—two lovely ball dresses with flower borders, light and soft as the air,—an inlaid ivory fan with white tassels, the cost of which Mrs. Witt had not dared to ask—and then, above all, some real Parisian flowers for her hair!

Cicely had not been forgotten either; Karsten had got Wally to secure her correct measurements, and had brought her a tight-fitting silk dress from Paris; also a parasol and a hat—the latter being in every one's opinion quite a work of art.

For Mrs. Witt, among other things, there was a round box, which vanished too suddenly for any one to have an opportunity of observing it; but from that day Mrs. Witt's silver grey tresses appeared in more luxuriant form from under her thin gauze cap.

The first days were almost wholly spent at Karsten's, in giving advice, and looking over all their lovely purchases for themselves and their house, which were being gradually unpacked.

"It must all have cost a good deal, Karsten!"

"Yes, indeed," he laughed; "but then my father-in-law had promised us a proper wedding trip, with a valuable letter of credit, and they are all really purchases which will save us expense in the long run. You see rich people get things cheaper in this way, mother."

The presents which he had given to Martha proved that he fully understood his mother's inten-

tions with regard to her; Karsten had always thought so much of home!

And Martha? She was no longer the unreliable, restless girl, whom no one could depend upon. It was almost touching to notice how humble and obedient she had become since this trip abroad.

She was never known to retort; she seemed only too anxious to forestall the wishes of her parents. Tears would come to her eyes sometimes when her mother was stroking her head. Hers was such a tender nature!

Mrs. Witt took good care not to refer to Jan. That wound must heal of itself. Cobwebs, they say, are good as lint for wounds, and forgetfulness none the less so.

She gave Martha a little of everything to do, in order to occupy her attention. The new silk dress, with narrow stripes, which Martha was to have, would in itself be a great diversion.

The next few days were passed in discussing, cutting, and sewing; and Mrs. Witt found opportunities to hint at the prospects which all this dress and finery suggested, and at all they had to think over and get ready for the winter. It would be very *à propos* if she could raise a little ambition in Martha in that direction.

And Martha listened attentively and submissively.

But one day Mrs. Witt was rather taken aback.

Martha stood at the window, with her head leaning against the framework, apparently listening attentively to her mother's proposal regarding the dress-trimmings. As she turned round her mother could see she had been crying. "Another of her whimsical fancies!" thought Mrs. Witt. Yet she was so pliable, and allowed her mother to lead her in everything!

Of late she had taken it into her head to sit with Nella in her room of an afternoon. It was quite a pleasure to see her sewing so diligently and industriously.

Mrs. Witt would come in now and then to prevail on her to go for a walk before supper.

"Her mind doesn't seem to be so full of Jan lately, Nella," she remarked one day, when Martha had gone out.

There came no answer. A stubbly end of a plait stuck out obstinately from behind Nella's grey head, as she sat busily munching at something.

"Well, Nella, you own yourself that we don't hear a word about him."

Nella nodded her head in the slow, dogged way Mrs. Witt knew so well.

"You always keep so quiet about things, Nella," said Mrs. Witt, rather irritably. "It was your bounden duty to have told me all you knew of this affair. You can't tell me you have been quite blind.

A strange expression flitted across Nella's face; she looked depressed and weighed down.

And Martha counted and counted the days. In five weeks—at the beginning of October at the latest—Jan would be back.

The Commodore had opened his official letters. It was always a relief to him when this was done.

He stood for a while at the window, whistling to himself, with a satisfied air, looking out over the stretch of ground in front of the house. Then he settled down in an easy chair to read the newspapers in comfort.

He scanned the smaller papers hurriedly—it was only the advertisements on the back that attracted his attention—before he took up the larger ones.

Now and then a "H'm" or a grunt, and an impatient crackling noise as he turned the sheets. He sometimes wished he had a few of these heroes of the pen on his quarter-deck—he would soon make short work of them. . . . .

Suddenly he drew himself up with a short cry, and began reading intently, holding the paper up before him with both hands. He stared at the print, as if he distrusted his own ability to understand, and the paper trembled in his grasp.

Then he let his hand, with the paper, drop at his side, and sat staring at the floor.

He remained immovable for a long time. The perspiration stood on his forehead; his wrinkles became more and more marked; the venerable face, with the large bony features, and thin, grey whiskers, seemed to grow shorter under a heavy weight of sorrow. His mouth twitched nervously, and his lips trembled with overwhelming emotion.

The silence was only broken by the scratching of his clerk's pen at the desk.

The Commodore took up the paper again, but did not go on reading it.

"H'm, h'm . . . ."

His face once more assumed its natural expression. He turned over the paper, so that the column which had attracted his attention lay uppermost.

"H'm, h'm," came a little slower. He pursed his lips, as if taking a final decision, and rose from his seat.

Placing the paper in his breast-pocket, he walked out of the office, stood still a moment in the passage, then slowly opened the sitting-room door.

"Is mother here?"

"No; she is out in the garden."

"Did you see father's face, Cicely?" said Martha, when he had closed the door.

"I wonder if there is anything the matter with Karsten?" exclaimed Cicely. "I don't know how it is; I am never quite easy about him—I am always expecting that something will suddenly

happen." Cicely glanced at Martha, who sat, pale and anxious, staring out of the window.

"He is going out to mother bareheaded," said Martha.

"Are you there, Julia?" asked the Commodore, as he went out into the garden.

Mrs. Witt, in a shady summer-hat, and her dress fastened up over her red petticoat, was busy attending to her dahlias—cutting one here and there for the vases.

She drew herself up and looked at her husband, her scissors in her hand.

"Really, my dear Witt, you haven't got your cap on! .... Anna! Anna!" she called, in the direction of the still-room, "run in ...."

"Come with me, Julia—to the summer-house," said he, in a low voice. "I must prepare you for a very serious piece of news. I am so sorry, so sorry, you see—and mostly on account of poor Martha! You understand, of course, it is something about Jan. You see—he—is no longer among the living! I loved him—the clever, fine boy! And I was glad at heart that—— But there is an end to that now! The *Lucida* has been burnt in the middle of the Atlantic, with a full cargo of petroleum. The hull has been floating about like a charred shell. Here is a full account of it in the paper, taken from the American and English newspapers, together with the names of the captain and crew. They were all

lost! Do you see there: it says, 'Jan Börresen, captain, Norwegian by birth . . . .'

"There can be no doubt about it. The ship that discovered the wreck had seen a fire on the horizon the preceding night, and the charred remains showed that not a single boat had left the ship. There must have been an explosion on board."

Mrs. Witt had sunk into a chair in the summer-house, quite overwhelmed. She felt for the moment as if she should faint. A fear came over her—her conscience began to trouble her.

"I have thought of nothing else but Martha's welfare," she moaned, rocking to and fro . . . . "But"—the tears came into her eyes, she seized her husband's hands in both her own—"my dear Witt! you must not ask me to break this news to Martha! I lean on you, you know . . . . I cannot do it . . . . After all, it is you . . . ."

The Commodore stood and regarded her with a strange searching look.

"I do not understand you, Julia. I was, of course, also greatly at fault—I am too old, and I go to sleep at the helm. But," he added, his voice trembling with emotion, "I would give all the years of my life since the day that she was born, for the child not to feel that we are to blame!"

He walked slowly away. At the garden-gate he met Martha, who, as her anxiety increased, had come out to meet him, with his cap in her hand.

He stroked her cheek, and, taking her by the arm, said:

"You must come in with me, child . . . . I must prepare you for some not very good news . . . . Here is a newspaper which you must read . . . . There are things which one must . . . ."

Martha saw her mother at the garden-gate, coming after them.

"Is it about Jan? Anything about him in the paper? . . . . Oh, my God!"

She took the paper from her father's hand, and instinctively made her way to her bedroom.

The Commodore and his wife shortly afterwards went to the door and listened, while Cicely stood by, pale and troubled.

They had heard a scream, and then all had become quiet.

When they entered they found her stretched pale and unconscious on the floor by the sofa.

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Martha had been in bed for three days.

She had read that account in the paper over and over again, till at last she found herself reading it in her dreams, and saw the whole fire and Jan in the midst of the flames. She was there, trembling with fear, with no possibility of saving him; then she would awake with a wild cry of anguish.

There were some words in the account which were burnt into her brain.

"*The black wreck lay drifting in the middle of the ocean like an empty shell. When they came alongside and the boat struck against the huge, deserted vessel, the iron frame resounded from end to end, and uttered a plaintive cry to the morning air.*"

To Martha as she lay in her feverish dreams, the air was musical with a solemn dirge, and a huge bell was tolling over Jan's grave out there at sea.

She was Jan's widow, no matter what the world might say.

There was a certain air of peace and resignation about her, as she arose from her bed and dressed herself.

She would confide in her father and tell him the truth unhesitatingly—she had no other choice!

Martha had been into her father's study. It had been a hard, tearful task to confess everything.

Shortly afterwards the Commodore went up to his wife in her bedroom.

He girded his loins and prepared himself;—his old heart was with Martha. He knew the world and all that was in store for her,—how she would have to bend her young, erect head, poor girl. . . .

Mrs. Witt was accustomed to make her toilet in peace and privacy, undisturbed; she generally chose the hour when her husband was making his morning round of the dockyard. She was now busy curling

her hair, so the Commodore was not particularly well received.

There was something in the old face to-day that told her it would be out of place to show any displeasure at this intrusion, something so distressed and at the same time impressive. She looked at him in her uncertainty with growing anxiety—had he decided to send in his resignation? . . . . The curling-tongs were forgotten, and the loose locks were thrown aside on the counterpane, when the Commodore had confided Martha's confession to his wife.

She sat in silence, weighing the matter and the results in her mind. Then all became a blank—it was as if an avalanche had fallen and dashed her hopes and expectations into pieces.

Fierce bitterness arose in her heart against Jan. She gave vent to her feelings in violent paroxysms of rage, while the Commodore sat patiently with his head sunk on his breast. He knew her passion must spend itself.

They had intended to go into mourning for him; yes, now they had real cause to mourn! . . . . She had indeed reason to cry out to him for her innocent daughter, and call him to account! . . . .

Had she not sought to protect the house against him from the very first?

"Now, now, that is enough!" interrupted the

Commodore; "we must not be too hard on them. They were quite unnaturally driven by you, Julia!—by all the pressure you brought to bear upon them. You must be very careful not to wound Martha's sorrow by speaking ill of Jan;—there has been enough of that already. The world will be hard and severe enough upon her; with us—her parents—she must have peace . . . . There was such a strange dignity about her during her humiliating confession," said the Commodore, giving utterance to his thoughts; "just as if she would not have it otherwise. You see, Julia, properly speaking, this way of looking at it is the only comfort she has in the midst of her misfortune,—it is her chief mainstay."

"Well, I must say that is a pretty comfort—a wrecked life!"

Mrs. Witt leant forward on the edge of the bed, clasping her hands; the jewelled rings lay on the dressing-table:

"We must not think of anything else, Witt, except what we can do to avoid shame and scandal! We must send her to Germany to perfect herself in the language, and that at once . . . . It will seem reasonable enough after her visit to Switzerland, that she should want to make something of her Kristiansfeldt German."

XIX.

THEY had been busy all the morning in the Commodore's office making up accounts and paying wages. Silver coins had been doled out, some in sealed bags, some rolled in paper, and some in shining piles; everything was well booked and checked, and the iron safe was closed and locked.

The Commodore had the same trouble every time with these accounts and settlements; his tightly compressed lips, which on these occasions became more contracted even than usual, showed that he was worried. He found it difficult to hide the nervous trembling of his hand when he was writing. Old as he was, he would ten times rather have stood on the bridge in a heavy gale, than at his age and with his increasing loss of memory, be, in this state of perpetual anxiety over his accounts, where responsibility might rush in and overwhelm him through some little rift in his figures.

To-day this task was over. His forehead, with the thin grey hair at the sides, wore a far quieter expression: the Commodore walked up and down the small room apparently in a happier frame of

mind, while the clerk put the books together and moved away.

On the top of a pile of bank notes, in one corner of the desk several piles of silver were still left out. It was the usual monthly housekeeping money, which Mrs. Witt generally sent one of her daughters to fetch.

The Commodore did not look pleased when his wife appeared herself in the doorway. He suspected she had come to press him for some extra money; he remembered such visits before.

"There, Julia," he said, pointing to the desk, "there is your money."

"Thank you, my dear," said his wife, taking up the money; then she added:

"Yes, we could manage very well, if we had not the children to think of. Martha's journey——"

"Don't talk about that. That is all past—gone with last year's snow."

"And then Karsten," she went on with a deep sigh. "His position is rather painful now that his father-in-law is having such hard times; he could not very well live in a plainer style without damaging the Wanckels' credit. Every one would guess he could not get the usual support from that source any longer."

"Then he ought to move to another town; that is the most simple way out of the difficulty."

"What are you thinking of, Witt? An expensive

removal within two years after their marriage! Just for the sake of a passing crisis. Wanckel's fortune is quite safe, Karsten says; it is invested in ships and property; it is only the scarcity of ready money; they say it's the same everywhere just now. Certainly it *is* awkward for these capitalists; one moment they are up and another they are down. . . . And Karsten just now is so depressed," sighed Mrs. Witt; "he says he absolutely *must* have two hundred dollars. He had counted so surely on having them, and now it seems it is quite impossible for him to get the money down at the office! . . . He has just been telling me; I don't know what to do, Witt! He is so upset. He has got a three months' bill from Wanckel for the money, he says; but it is impossible to get it discounted now, and then—just listen and consider, my dear Witt!—he thought you might help him by taking it. You might draw to-day from what you have in the savings' bank. I tell you we must do this for the boy, Witt."

There was something defiant, and, at the same time helpless, in the glance which the Commodore shot at his wife. This was the third time he had been asked to make payments on account of these hard times at Consul Wanckel's.

"Karsten, as you know, Julia, has had the little he may expect as his inheritance already. It was, of course, only a trumpery trifle to him, those eight

hundred dollars. Times may be hard enough for you and me yet, when we have only our pension to live upon. Perhaps you would like us to have to depend upon his help then," he said.

His pale face flushed with indignation.

"My dear Witt, why do you always exaggerate so much? It may lose you your son's love altogether. It is only a question of helping the Wanckels with two hundred dollars as delicately as possible."

"Delicately? . . . . I am to have the right to break up Karsten's home for the money; yes, and Wanckel's too. Delicate!" he roared, in great excitement. "Do you call it delicate to squeeze the last drop of blood out of his old father?"

"Witt, Witt!—don't you think you are unreasonable; don't you see it yourself? Do you think Karsten capable of such a thing?"

"There, take the bank book," he said, much agitated; "but—no bill, I tell you. I will not look at such a thing."

"My dear husband, why do you take everything so seriously; it is almost unbearable! It seems as if I were your evil genius. If it were not that Karsten wants this money so badly, I would never have come on such an errand! But all the same I cannot help feeling proud that after all it is his father alone who can help him now. I think it will have an effect upon the Wanckels."

When she was gone the Commodore stood at his

desk for a long time buried in thought. There was a hard expression over his face. He was bitterly conscious of his own feebleness; he could no longer endure excitement, nor the feeling of responsibility. He saw how, in his advancing age, he became a defenceless victim to the stronger will of his wife; how, like a helpless wreck, he could be driven in any direction—perhaps to end his days in the quicksands of a business failure.

He had thought of retiring from his position of responsibility and seeking rest, but Julia had prevailed on him to remain at his post.

And in this way he was driven by them. They had all become his enemies.

He smiled bitterly—if only he retired he could steer clear of them!

His face assumed a knowing, self-satisfied expression. He placed one hand over the other on the desk, as if he were slowly and thoughtfully moulding his resolution into shape.

When Martha, after an absence of nearly twelve months had returned last year from Germany, Mrs. Witt, in order to divert possible suspicion, had attempted with some ostentation to make much of her as the newly returned daughter.

She was anxious to be on an easier footing with public opinion. She had hitherto, without contradiction, presided over the supreme court of public

opinion in the town—now, but one little squeal from Stolpe in Pomerania, and she would be morally dethroned, hopelessly disqualified.

But the exertion of carrying this business through had been inconceivable. Martha ought to have a much stronger sense of the sacrifice that her irreparable folly imposed upon her. She said she ought to understand how important it was that everything should go on as usual.

Mrs. Witt saw only too clearly that Martha's little attempts at submission were only made because she felt how depressed and unhappy they all were on her account.

Unfortunately Martha's nature did not allow her to forget such a memorable event in her life—even for the necessary time.

The thoughts that filled her mind were written on her face; any one could read them. There was something so intractable in Martha; she was like a bird that flies into a room and tries to beat its way through the window-panes.

Mrs. Witt would have said that the melancholy in which she shrouded herself almost betrayed her secret. Martha must really re-assert herself, and assume a little of her old vivacity. She said she would even like to see her give way to a little of her old childishness.

Martha's sad eyes, full of resignation, told that all these attempts were unsuccessful; at best she only

answered with her pleasant smile. She felt a hundred miles away from their questions ; her whole heart and interest clung sadly to one object—her little boy down at Stolpe, in Pomerania.

She was wondering how she could manage to send him some clothes, some shirts, some socks, some stays, and a crochet cradle quilt.

Little Jan's face rose before her—the eyebrows which had already begun to darken before she left him ; the funny little nose, the strange mouth with its changeful expression ; the beautiful little hands which were now clutching at Mrs. Jahr's hair—he was not allowed to live for his own mother, poor little fellow !

Mrs. Witt felt that things could never go on like this, if appearances were to be kept up. Martha's manner invited suspicion.

The only way out of the difficulty that occurred to her mother was to let her hope that she would be able to take a trip down there in a year or two. Time, Mrs. Witt hoped, would help them all.

It was strange to see the effect of this hope upon Martha. A feeling of calm came over her, and when now and then a gleam of her old gaiety came back, her mother thought their trouble was almost forgotten.

One afternoon Martha was sitting in her room engaged in a strange occupation. She could not resist bringing up her favourite doll from the sofa-

ottoman in the ball-room, putting on its clothes and making a bed for it in her chest of drawers. She was rather flurried when she heard Cicely's step coming along the passage. She was not quite certain whether she had succeeded in hiding the doll before her sister came in to dress for her usual walk before supper.

Cicely looked at her in surprise, and said rather sharply:

"I should think you had better put on your things and come out, too, Martha; and not sit there playing."

Martha quite understood why Cicely was in such a hurry, and so restless to-day. Lieutenant Fasting and Laura had come home on a visit to Laura's parents; they had not been back since they were married two years ago, the same autumn that Martha went away.

"Why don't you speak out for once in a way?" asked Cicely. "I can't make you out, you never say a word; you might give us all a good blowing up if you liked."

Martha looked up with astonished eyes; she was not used to hearing her troubles discussed.

"The way you have been treated!" continued Cicely. "They trample upon us as they like, and we women mustn't murmur or cry. There are two men in this world whom I really have believed in; and they have disappointed me as deeply as it is

possible to be disappointed. They are all alike, all of them."

"Do you mean Jan? Yes, you mean Jan!"

A tremor passed over Martha's face; she felt how powerless she was to defend him.

"Ah! how little you understand," she said, piteously.

A silence followed.

"Well, well, you will not be angry with me, will you, Martha?" said Cicely, who had hurriedly put on her hat and gloves.

There was no comfort to be derived from Martha. Perhaps it was best to let her remain in her innocent illusion; she was too good for this world, and yet inconsiderate people——

Cicely went off for her evening walk, her restless spirit urging her onward.

She had begun a reckoning with Fate in general and with men in particular. Full of bitterness, her quick eye seemed to search for opportunities to give vent to her spleen. No one understood better than she how to spice their remarks; hers were both amusing and biting.

Cicely could very well have gone round by the pond and the church, and thus have avoided the windows of the Foxes. Laura would, of course, keep away from the window, hide herself, and slyly give place to . . . . But why all this?

She turned quickly round the corner and walked

down the street, glancing in at the window and bowing to Mrs. Fox, who turned round apparently to call Laura. She came to the window and Cicely returned her nod as she passed on.

"She looks awfully proud," said Fasting, who remained at the window, looking after her.

"Poor Cicely," exclaimed Mrs. Fox. "I really think she understands that people are afraid of her tongue."

"She's very fónd of criticising others, people tell me," added Laura gaily, who was growing stout and matronly and more and more like her mother.

"There was something in that girl once," said Fasting, concluding some reflections of his own; "but any one who tries to dive and fathom it will be drowned in the attempt. There are women who have many a wreck upon their conscience," he said, with an attempt at a laugh.

"Fie, Fasting! You mustn't talk like that about Cicely, she is an old friend of mine; pray be polite."

"I remember," said Mrs. Fox, disdainfully, "when she first came home from Kristiansfeldt how her mother confided in me, that she had made up her mind not to let Cicely get married till she was over twenty. I should say Mrs. Witt is not so particular on that point now. It is wonderful what pretensions they have had in that house. However, one ought not to judge others. We for our part have known nothing but kindness at their hands."

XX.

NEARLY ten years went by, and many changes with them. The dockyard had lost some of its importance. The very air seemed filled with sadness at the deserted appearance of the public workshops and buildings, and of the town itself, which had owed its growth and its life to the dockyard.

It was easy for people with small pensions to live there now; empty houses were to be had in plenty. Among the families that were left life was very quiet in comparison with the merrymakings of the bygone years.

Commodore Witt had resigned long ago. He was now living in one of the old houses of the town, the bright panes, and the well-polished door-plates of which showed plainly that old Nella's indefatigable hands were busy still.

The Commodore, by the aid of a crutch, made his way every day to the harbour, and no one dared to follow him. It was his morning's work to go and have an argument with old Betts; every day brought its expostulation from his wife, who perseveringly pointed out to him the dangers and risks

of the proceeding, not forgetting to regale him every time with a catalogue of the little misadventures due to his increasing absence of mind.

"You will only get tired gain, Witt; and you will do just as you did once before when you went into the club to read the papers, and fell asleep, and forgot all about dinner."

"Indeed, Julia, I could walk as far again without feeling tired."

"Nonsense, Witt, you know very well you could not."

"I tell you I could go twice as far—three, four, five—ten times as far!" he answered, impatiently. His naval coat hung loosely about his gaunt form; he stooped painfully as he tottered down the steps.

Mrs. Witt sat in an invalid chair, sleeping or reading novels; she would relapse into a bad humour if no one came to visit her during the day. She expected her friends to pay her a call regularly, and they knew she kept account and looked upon any omission as a neglect in paying their bounden homage.

Everything in the house was conducted on the most economical principles as a matter of necessity. With Consul Wanckel's great failure and Karsten's subsequent difficulties, all the money the Commodore had saved up for his old age had been swept away. Karsten must be supported at any cost that he might be able to remain in his official position.

There were also certain other expenses which had to be met promptly. To them, no doubt, were to be attributed Mrs. Witt's tell-tale sighs; in them was hidden the secret cause of all the family depression.

Martha understood.

It was the quiet "hush" which rested over the house.

Time had told upon Martha. The calm, appealing eyes buried in the pale, thin face, assumed sometimes a frightened, inquiring look. She had lived in a world of her own, with a hidden longing, first for Jan and then for her little one; he who must not be named!

There was one bright spot in her memory—six years ago she had gone to see him in Stolpe and stayed for two months, and let him call her "Auntie."

She had kissed and played with him on her lap like a mother; had dressed him, put him to bed, and sat by his side at night, eager to see him breathe and sleep, to feel the warmth of his body, and notice the strange likeness of feature and expression. In the daytime she would teach him a Norwegian word or two, and would tell him about a man who was *so* kind, and whom he must love, and who had jet black eyes like little Jan himself, and even darker hair.

She lived now in the faint hope of seeing him

again. Every penny she could put aside she had saved for this purpose.

Mrs. Jahr sent her receipts for the payments, and wrote and described him in response to Martha's pressing prayers; letters were not to be sent too often, in order to avoid suspicion.

Since the time when she was down there, little Jan had enclosed letters written in his own handwriting to his aunt in Norway. She brooded and lingered fondly over these tiny epistles, followed in imagination the growth of the boy from the first great, clumsy strokes with all sorts of childish scribblings, and a few Norwegian words here and there to show he remembered everything that his aunt asked about in the letters he received through Mrs. Jahr, to the more formed schoolboy hand, finished off with many flourishes.

In her imagination she figured to herself a bright, lively schoolboy, dressed in a blouse, a boy who belonged to her, whose eyes sparkled and twinkled with animation. She tried to picture to herself how tall he was now. Jan had not been very tall, but strong and self-willed.

At times she would stand at the kitchen window watching the boys on the other side of the fence near the pump.

The childish voices would keep her rooted to the spot. She caught a glimpse of her Jan here and there amongst them. It was her delight to be able

to hand out furtively a piece of sugar or cake to some of them as they trotted past the door in the morning with their straps full of books; a secret compact linked her to them.

Jan began to send her pressed flowers and butterflies, the spoils of his school excursions into the country with his teachers. But as his way of expressing himself became more perfect, so the old familiar endearments began to vanish; his recollection of her must have outlived itself; he must have forgotten everything of that time when they were together, that time which was as fresh to her as the events of yesterday.

She felt every day that he was gradually gliding further and further from her reach; she was in despair, tortured by an increasing, inexpressible fear lest she should lose him. These specimens of caligraphy which he now sent her stood like a wall of ice between them.

And so she would remain lost in thought, gazing at her savings. It would take years before they would be large enough for what she wished, and he would then be quite a stranger to her.

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The ordinary Saturday house-cleaning had been going on all over the house since early morning.

The charwoman felt she was under the surveillance of a pair of watchful eyes, which for want of something else to do had acquired a wonderful facility for discovering dust and stains. Cicely did not allow

any carelessness in work; she looked carefully after everything, and would go round with the duster herself and inspect even Nella's door-plates, window-posts, and pictures, because she said Nella's hands were growing numb and could only half do things where strength was needed.

The house seemed turned topsy-turvy; windows open, furniture out of place, dusting and scouring everywhere; while the charwoman with her pail gradually advanced over the unpainted floor, leaving a dark damp space behind. And through it all was heard Martha's dry cough. Her health was not in a state to cope with all these draughts and damp floors.

It was quite a relief when Cicely went out to the committee meeting of a charity club, of which she was an active member.

Cicely often bought gold too dearly in Mrs. Witt's opinion: one risked one's health in this way. Mrs. Witt had had to beat a sharp retreat from her bedroom to-day because it was to be scrubbed out.

She took a seat by the window in the comfortable sitting-room; it gave her such pleasure to see everything so well polished and so bright.

Through the window she could see Mrs. Falkenberg coming along the street on a morning call.

She rang the bell on the table.

"Martha, will you get some chocolate ready, and

bring in some cakes in the silver basket. Put out the best tea-set. Let Nella go across the street and get some fresh cakes, and put some rose-leaves on the stove. Turn my chair a little first."

The visit was quite a long one. Mrs. Falkenberg had much news, not forgetting the troubles of her daughter Elise and her two sons, who were now separated from one another and lived in different parts of the country.

Mrs. Falkenberg seemed as if she would never finish, and Mrs. Witt listened sympathetically with her most charming smile, while her set of white teeth contrasted painfully with her aged face. Mrs. Witt felt that she must bring Mrs. Falkenberg's stories to an end and begin upon her own favourite theme—Karsten.

His income was, of course, small, complained Mrs. Witt, and with his habits he felt this doubly;—and such a man, fêted as he was, could not very well shirk the social life of the town; but she felt so relieved and glad that he no longer thought of going upon the dangerous voyage up north. Her anxiety during these two years! . . . . It was really brave of him ever to have been in that service.—Yes, Karsten was a noble character. She had felt quite sure of that the other day when he suddenly appeared in the room, and declared his intention of selling all his beautiful furniture except what was absolutely necessary, and of looking out for another appoint-

ment. "I could not help admiring him, he never breathed a word of blame against any one!"

She suddenly broke off with:

"So your Elise is not quite well, Mrs. Falkenberg?"

At that moment Cicely appeared at the front door, and Mrs. Witt knew that the opportunity for praising her dear boy was gone.

Cicely's opinion—as she frankly told her mother—was that Karsten only reaped the fruits of his own sowing. He had married for money and had been duped.

She came into the sitting-room and bowed to Mrs. Falkenberg, taking off her hat and showing her rich chestnut hair, which was plaited in thick coils at the back of her head. Her figure was stately and well developed, inclined perhaps to be plump; and her pretty face wore a sharp, determined expression, which made Mrs. Falkenberg draw herself up in her chair, and suddenly remember that she had really stayed much too long. Cicely's firmly set mouth betrayed that she was not in the sweetest temper with the world—her lips trembled with apparent indignation.

"What do you think, Mrs. Falkenberg? Our old friend Captain Jerwel who wrote those beautiful verses about his wife last year, has found consolation at last; he has taken a girl of seventeen, in fact,

they are already married! 'Love in Heaven dwells,' he wrote in his verses—indeed, I was quite moved when I read it. . . . . All men should be able to write verses—and grind them out afterwards on a barrel-organ. It's such a nice, easy way of getting out of it."

Mrs. Falkenberg laughed as she went downstairs. Cicely Witt had got something to talk about again. Did she ever say a good word for men?

"Oh, dear me, somebody is ringing at the front door, Martha," exclaimed Mrs. Witt. "I hope it isn't father, and that he won't go in again to the inspector's downstairs by mistake. Perhaps he will be standing there again when they open the door. . . . . Just look after him on the stairs, will you?"

The Commodore came struggling up; he rested at every third step and then went on wearily, looking ahead suspiciously to see if any one was on the look-out for him. He had been for a walk to the Post Office and had his newspapers in his coat pocket.

On the landing Martha came to help him off with his coat, and take the papers.

"No, no, I tell you; come back with them!"

He put his hand inside the wrappers, and pulled out a letter which he had put there.

It bore a German post mark. Martha saw it.

He opened the letter in his wife's room.

Enclosed was the usual letter for Martha. He turned it over and over in his hand, as if divining the contents; there was something inside like a thick card; without a word he handed it to his wife.

She also fingered it and turned it over; then gave vent to an exclamation which seemed to express the feelings of both.

"Don't let Nella see you giving it to Martha, Witt."

During dinner the Commodore glanced several times surreptitiously at Martha; there were traces of emotion on her thin face, and her eyes betrayed that she had wept, she, who was always so careful to conceal her feelings.

The Commodore was snoring on the sofa in his bedroom when Martha came in with his coffee; the newspaper had fallen on the floor.

He awoke as Martha placed the cup on the table beside him.

"Thank you," he said, looking at her; "thank you, Martha; h'm, h'm, that was rather a thick letter you got, Martha—all well?" he asked cautiously.

No allusion of the kind had ever been made all these years, and the tears sprang to Martha's eyes.

"Yes, thank you, father," she answered almost inaudibly, hurriedly making her way to the door.

The Commodore sat up and coughed.

"Martha! h'm—won't you let me see the photograph you received?"

She started, as if she needed time to understand.

"Oh, thank you, father!"

She took the envelope from her pocket, handed it to him, and quickly left the room.

She went about the whole afternoon anxious and restless, she could not settle down to anything, but walked from room to room, starting every time the door was opened.

She felt chilled and stood in the dusk of the evening before the kitchen fire warming her cold hands.

The Commodore opened the door and looked in, but seeing Nella shovelling up cinders from the fire to take into the sitting-room, he shut it again.

In a little while he returned to the kitchen, and gave back the photograph to Martha.

"That's a fine boy—a very fine boy—really a splendid little chap! I pity you, I pity the little fellow, I pity ourselves altogether; it is a great misfortune to us all." Here his voice began to quiver, and he moved away, afraid his feelings might overpower him.

Martha was busy getting supper ready; she was

thinking how she could manage to sit by herself to-night in order to look at the picture.

Something so strange had happened!

She had lived at home like a solitary prisoner in a dark confined room, with all her troubles. Now an opening had been made, which let in a few rays of light and friendship.

XXI.

CICELY'S fancy for brightening and polishing was fast becoming a mania. She rubbed her irritability and energy into the old mahogany furniture. Chair-backs, tables and chiffoniers were, so to speak, aglow with her cheerless cynicism.

During the last fortnight the polishing flannel had rested, and Nella's brushes and pastes had been very little in use.

Martha's cough, which during the last two or three winters had been very trying, took a serious turn from a cold which she caught early in the spring. She was seized with violent attacks of blood-spitting and extreme languor.

At times, when she had managed to regain some of her strength, she seemed quite well, but she was very careless, her mother said. Opium pills were quite an effective remedy against coughing at night when used regularly, and she ought to wear plenty of flannel.

The Commodore had more belief in the warm weather; *that* would be better than any amount of medicine.

It was only when the attacks became more frequent that they began to exchange anxious looks; a cold chill seemed to rest upon the house when the doctor shook his head apprehensively.

It was a terrible shock to Cicely; her whole nature was moved.

As she sat at her sister's side during the night, anxiously awaiting every fresh attack, she began to see signs of something, over which the daily routine of everyday life had thrown a veil.

Martha had once been so merry, so wild and unruly, no one could do anything with her; later on so calm and compliant, ready, so it seemed, to atone for her existence by making way for others. And, as a matter of course, it followed that Cicely should come first, and be waited upon first.

During the illness it made her heart ache to notice how grateful Martha was for every little service—how unassuming and humble—as if unworthy. She! Martha!—her sister!

And all this came of the life which they, her nearest, had been living.

And so it was that men and women for want of a mutual understanding could torture one other unconsciously, make one another's hearts bleed till the spirit was broken, and the will bent in submission.

And thus one could live with one's own sister, and trample the life out of her!

Still she sat thinking about Martha and herself till she was suddenly roused by hearing her sister moaning and moving uneasily—the usual forerunner of an attack.

Martha sat up in bed ; she felt as if she would choke, she said, and looked helplessly around her.

Cicely took her thin, damp hands in hers and put her arm round her as the coughing began. She could feel how Martha's frame trembled during the fit, and how fragile and weak she was getting.

It was a violent attack, and Cicely discovered that she coughed up blood.

Afterwards she sank back pale and exhausted on her pillow. Cold, heavy drops of perspiration stood upon her forehead ; her eyes closed in a sleep of utter prostration before Cicely had covered her over.

As Cicely moved the light so that it should not disturb her sister, she saw a card on the floor beside the bed.

It was the photograph.

She sat for a long time at the head of the bed holding it up to the faint glimmer of the light.

That was Jan's hair, his black eyes. Martha's boy !

Martha had kept the card under her pillow ; it bore signs of having been carried about a great deal.

So she had lived her life to herself, with no one to confide in.

The pretty boy! There lay Martha's life; she had been forced to hide away the best part of her own self!

During the long night, as Cicely sat watching at her sister's bedside, she made up her mind that at any risk Martha should see her Jan.

And now the anxiety that Martha might obtain the great desire of her life before the end came weighed with the old couple above everything. Notwithstanding the compromising position in which the family would be placed and the many difficulties connected with the affair, it was decided that Jan should be sent for; and they promised Martha that he should be brought up in their house as a relative whom they had adopted.

Martha had known the whole day that the boy was coming, and lay smiling and thoughtful; a gleam of youth and happiness lighted the weary, suffering face.

She had felt so well all the morning, and had scarcely been troubled by the cough; but now she was growing restless; she tossed from side to side, sat up in bed, lay down again, and then suddenly asked the time. Jan was expected by the steamer at five o'clock.

She threw herself forward; a sharp fit of coughing shook her.

The spasm grew violent. Martha fought and

struggled, half-suffocated, to regain her breath. At one moment it seemed gone, and then she fought again, moaning, her body convulsed by the spasmodic outbreaks of the cough.

They all stood anxiously around her, waiting for the attack to cease ; it seemed as if she should not see her son after all!

"It will pass over," said Nella, slowly nodding her head as if in answer to everybody's thoughts; "she is not ready to go before she has seen her boy."

Mrs. Witt and Cicely exchanged a look ; Nella had evidently known about it all these years, then, and understood everything.

Martha lay in a quiet stupor for about an hour.

Now she opened her eyes, and looked uneasily towards the door. She must have heard somebody out on the landing.

Cicely quietly opened the door.

A black-headed boy, about thirteen years old, was waiting outside, his face swollen with crying.

"He can come now, father," Martha said softly.

In an instant the boy was at her bedside.

He started back and stared at the pale, emaciated form which lay there with the great, unnaturally bright eyes fixed upon him. Her white hands moved tremblingly towards him.

Quite overpowered he threw himself into her arms.

When she felt his head upon her breast she smiled, and gently stroked his hair with both her hands.

Several times she tried to speak, as she lay looking at him. But her voice was gone, and she gazed at him with an anxious, yearning look. She knew that she was leaving him.

"Auntie is only thinking of Jan," he exclaimed, repeating the Norwegian phrase she had taught him.

"Mother!" she said, hastily correcting him, as she tried to raise herself.

She fell back on her pillow; her hands slipped from his cheeks.

She was dead.

Cicely saw it first; and she drew Jan towards her.

She still had him to live for—a crumb, as it were, fallen from poor Martha's table.

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